THE WORKS OF GEORGE MOORE
EBURY EDITION

CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN

THE WORKS OF GEORGE MOORE

EBURY EDITION

A MUMMER'S WIFE

MUSLIN

CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN

ESTHER WATERS

THE UNTILLED FIELD

THE LAKE

MEMOIRS OF MY DEAD LIFE

HAIL AND FAREWELL

I	II	III
AVE	SALVE	VALE

THE BROOK KERITH

A STORY-TELLER'S HOLIDAY (2 *Vols*)

HÉLOÏSE AND ABÉLARD

CELIBATE LIVES

APHRODITE IN AULIS

AVOWALS

CONVERSATIONS IN EBURY STREET

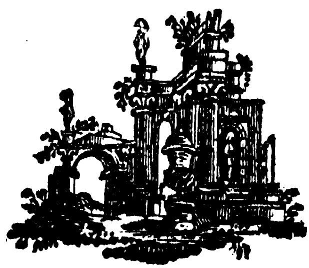
DAPHNIS AND CHLOE
AND PERONNIK THE FOOL

THE PASSING OF THE ESSENES

CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN

BY

GEORGE MOORE



London
William Heinemann Ltd.
1937

First Edition published by Swan, Sonnenschein 1888
New Edition edited and annotated by George Moore, and published by Werner Laurie . . . 1904
New Edition published by William Heinemann . 1917
New and revised edition containing five articles which the author has selected from his "Impressions and Opinions" (now out of print) as being worthy of admission into the canon. These articles are: "An Eighteenth-Century Actress," "Mummer-Worship," "A Visit to Medan," "Le Revers d'un Grand Homme," and "Epistle to the Cymry" . . . 1926
"Travellers' Library" Edition 1928
Reprinted 1928, 1929, 1930
Uniform Edition 1933
Ebury Edition 1937

Printed in Great Britain, at
The Windmill Press, Kingswood, Surrey

À JACQUES BLANCHE

L'Âme de l'ancien Égyptien s'éveillait en moi quand mourut ma jeunesse, et j'ai eu l'idée de conserver mon passé, son esprit et sa forme, dans l'art.

Alors trempant le pinceau dans ma mémoire, j'ai peint ses joues pour qu'elles prissent l'exacte ressemblance de la vie, et j'ai enveloppé le mort dans les plus fins linceuls. Rhamesès le second n'a pas reçu des soins plus pieux ! Que ce livre soit aussi durable que sa pyramide !

Votre nom, cher ami, je voudrais l'inscrire ici comme épitaphe, car vous êtes mon plus jeune et mon plus cher ami ; et il se trouve en vous tout ce qui est gracieux et subtil dans ces mornes années qui s'égouttent dans le vase du vingtième siècle.

G. M.

PREFACE

If I say that the end of the Nineteenth Century cannot brag of a more original book than *The Confessions of a Young Man*, I shall be deemed boastful and arrogant, but if the reader does not lay the book aside, he will probably discover me to be a man who would speak truthfully on all occasions, even about his own writings, a subject which lends itself to the exposition of a great deal of hypocrisy and insincerity, vices peculiarly disagreeable to me, and which I would avoid in the preface as I have avoided them in the book. Therefore, I relate, that the adjectives that came up in my mind on looking through these Confessions were "original" and "incomplete." No one will object to my applying the word "incomplete" to my own book, but the word "original," how is that to be justified? By a simple statement that the book owes its originality to the circumstances out of which it came rather than to any special talent in the writer. Gaiety, liveliness in plenty . . . talent? I am not sure that the word "talent" is applicable to these Confessions.

At the time of writing them I knew nothing of Jean Jacques Rousseau. It is barely credible that I could have lived into early manhood without having heard of him, but *The Confessions of a Young Man* testifies that I never read him; a page of Jean Jacques would have made the book I am prefacing an impossibility; another book more complete but less original might have been written. I wrote without a model, Jean Jacques, too, wrote without a model, but he wrote at the end of his life, between sixty and sixty-five. His book is life seen in long mysterious perspectives, whereas mine is merely the evanescent haze by the edge of the wood, the enchantment of a May morning. Youth goes forth singing; the song is often crude and superficial; youth cannot

be else than superficial ; but the book babbles spontaneously and truthfully, and this is why Pater liked it, and why it drew from him the letter that I print.

" BRASENOSE COLLEGE.
" *March* 4.

" MY DEAR, AUDACIOUS MOORE,—

" Many thanks for the 'Confessions,' which I have read with great interest, and admiration for your originality—your delightful criticisms—your Aristophanic joy, or at least enjoyment, in life—your unfailing liveliness. Of course, there are many things in the book I don't agree with. But then, in the case of so satiric a book, I suppose one is hardly expected to agree or disagree. What I cannot doubt is the literary faculty displayed. 'Thou com'st in such a questionable shape !' I feel inclined to say, on finishing your book ; 'shape,' morally, I mean, not in reference to style.

" You speak of my own work very pleasantly ; but my enjoyment has been independent of that. And still I wonder how much you may be losing, both for yourself and for your writings, by what, in spite of its gaiety and good nature and genuine sense of the beauty of many things, I must still call a cynical, and therefore exclusive, way of looking at the world. You call it only 'realistic.' Still !

" With sincere wishes for the future success of your most entertaining pen,

" Very sincerely yours,
" WALTER PATER."

A delightful letter, but Pater could not do else than write delightfully. Delightful is his word, perhaps, more than any other. It reveals him, and I would continue the revelation with other letters if I had managed to preserve them. His invitations to dinner, had I kept them, would have enabled me to show him still more plainly, and in the light in which it pleases me to place him before the reader as one that held

himself forbidden to put pen to paper without getting some of his art on to the paper though the subject matter was merely: "Will you dine with me on Thursday?" We have lost a great artist in Pater, for he could do this without suspicion of that priggishness which begins as soon as the artist lays his mind to the consideration of means rather than of ends; Pater always held the end in view; and his rule of life never to separate himself wholly from his art came out of an instinct; his art was to him what the nest is to the sitting bird; were he to remain away for long, he might find the nest disarrayed or himself might be changed. The sights and sounds of the outer world might have rendered his own original aim less desirable—to raise literature to the condition of music. To do other things and not to have achieved this would have been, in his view, to have done nothing, and to do this, I repeat, he felt that he must never separate himself wholly from his art. He was, therefore, always at composition; comma, semicolon, colon, dash, note of exclamation and interrogation always before his eyes. But Pater was also the most courteous of men, and as he would not have us think that he was composing whilst in our midst, he trained his face to wear a formal impassive expression behind which he could pursue his rhythms undisturbed. Pater's mask was the subject of many a debate as we turned out of Earl's Terrace into the High Street, but I doubt if anybody ever avouched the true reason for Pater's reservations of himself. We noticed, however, that he did not care for his disciples to accost him when he was out walking; a rapid sign of recognition was enough, and he hastened away composing his slowly moving rhythms. We guessed that he was composing, but the natural conclusion that his rule of life was never to separate himself wholly from his art escaped us. . . . Now it all comes back to me. I can see Pater at André Raffalowich's dinner-table, two very full-blown roses on either side of him, composing always. I doubt if he ever ceased composing except when he was asleep.

From talk of Pater I drag myself with almost the same difficulty as I drag myself from talk of Manet, both having such deep roots in my mind, but perforce I must abandon Pater now for the *Confessions of a Young Man.* The book is a sort of genesis; the seed of everything I have written since will be found herein. A friend once said to me, "You always had *Esther Waters* in your mind," and when I asked him what he meant he said, "Well, she is in the *Confessions of a Young Man,*" and for some time his meaning eluded me; then I understood that the servant girl, Emma, must have given rise to the story. It is also a book that may be described as a declaration of ideas and tastes, my love of the best things in modern literature and my love of the best things in modern painting, and my whilom weakness for subtle, passionate women. The one that writes a letter describing the sale of my furniture in the Rue de la Tour des Dames is an example. She, a ray of eroticism, falls across the pages but to disappear a moment afterwards, the book being more concerned with art than with the relaxations of the artist; and I am pleased to find that my tastes are to-day what they were in the early 'eighties.

The first eulogies written in England, I might almost say in any language, of Manet, Degas, Whistler, Monet, Pissarro, are in this book of Confessions, and whosoever reads will find himself unable to deny that time had vindicated all of them splendidly.

To the present edition I have added some French poems, but the reader will not think because I have done this that I attach any literary importance to these trifles; I know that any writing done in a foreign language is worthless, but the poems were written in or about the time of the Confessions, they belong to that period. The sonnet in which I dedicate Martin Luther, a drama, to Swinburne, is remarkable for a mistake in French that Mallarmé detected at once but which no one else has been able to discover, though it has been submitted to many poets. I have also added a third translation

from Mallarmé, the original edition containing translations of two prose poems, but there are three, the third was omitted from laziness, I suppose, or it may be it did not please me as much as the first two. It seems to me now singularly beautiful even in the translation, and I think readers will probably thank me for having included it.

A third addition is some verses inspired by Rubens' picture of his second wife, Helen Fromont, and the fourth is a ballade in the manner of Master François Villon, somewhat weak in versification and containing, I think, a fault in prosody—the counting of "*louis*" as one syllable, it surely should have been counted as two. . . . This mistake in versification has been corrected on the proof, and the ballade is now free from false prosody unless it be deemed false prosody to neglect the hemistich in verses of ten syllables ; in verses of twelve (the real French line) the hemistich has been abolished as antiquated ever since Banville wrote the famous line, "*Elle filait pensivement la blanche laine,*" a line that Richepin imitated, "*Elle tirait nonchalamment les bas de soie.*" It is, however, for the subject rather than for the versification that I print this ballade of old time ; for I would tell how at the end of the 'seventies we who spent our evenings in the Nouvelle Athènes used to look to the brothel for our literary inspirations. Every age has its favourite subject. Byron and Shelley looked to incest for theirs, and the brothel that had been neglected by poets since Villon wrote his celebrated ballade *La Grosse Margot* began to show aloft again, on the lower slopes, perhaps, but still it was on the slopes of Parnassus that Richepin wrote *Les Chansons des Gueux ;* Maupassant came later with his *Maison Tellier*. My old friend, Paul Alexis, contributed something, and my ballade is the last example of a literature about which professors of literature like to write, or rather to which they like to allude, never failing to add, "now happily extinct."

NOTE

On looking into the volume entitled *Impressions and Opinions* with a view to its inclusion in a complete edition of my writings I found it to consist of articles written on all kinds of subjects and in a variety of styles. These had been collected from various sources and I at once decided that *Impressions and Opinions* could not be admitted into the canon. But on turning the pages I came upon some half-dozen or more articles that arrested my attention sufficiently for me to cut them out with a view to using them if the occasion should ever present itself, and the occasion now presents itself. My writings are appearing one by one in a 10s. 6d. edition. The large pages of this edition will reduce the slender volume entitled *Confessions of a Young Man* to a mere pamphlet. Articles kept in a drawer have a tendency to disappear; I too share that tendency and in my future absence the Editor will pick out of the unacceptable volume for padding purposes the articles most distasteful to me; and it is in the hope of escaping this fate that I add as an Appendix to *Confessions of a Young Man:* "An Eighteenth-Century Actress," "Mummer-Worship," "A Visit to Medan," "Le Revers d'un Grand Homme," and "Epistle to the Cymry."

G. M.

CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN

CHAP. I

My soul, so far as I understand it, has very kindly taken colour and form from the many various modes of life that self-will and an impetuous temperament have forced me to indulge in. Therefore I may say that I am free from original qualities, defects, tastes, etc. What is mine I have acquired, or, to speak more exactly, chance bestowed, and still bestows, upon me. I came into the world apparently with a nature like a smooth sheet of wax, bearing no impress, but capable of receiving any; of being moulded into all shapes. Nor am I exaggerating when I say I think that I might equally have been a Pharaoh, an ostler, a pimp, an archbishop, and that in the fulfilment of the duties of each a certain measure of success would have been mine. I have felt the goad of many impulses, I have hunted many a trail; when one scent failed another was taken up, and pursued with the pertinacity of instinct, rather than the fervour of a reasoned conviction. Sometimes, it is true, there came moments of weariness, of despondency, but they were not enduring: a word spoken, a book read, or yielding to the attraction of environment, I was soon off in another direction, forgetful of past failures. Intricate, indeed, was the labyrinth of my desires; all lights were followed with the same ardour, all cries were eagerly responded to: they came from the right, they came from the left, from every side. But one cry was more persistent, and as the years passed I learned to follow it with increasing vigour, and my strayings grew fewer and the way wider.

I was eleven years old when I first heard and obeyed this

cry, or, shall I say, echo-augury?

Scene: A great family coach, drawn by two powerful country horses, lumbers along a narrow Irish road. The ever-recurrent signs—long ranges of blue mountains, the streak of bog, the rotting cabin, the flock of plover rising from the desolate water. Inside the coach there are two children. They wear new jackets and neckties; their faces are pale with sleep, and the rolling of the coach makes them feel a little sick. It is seven o'clock in the morning. Opposite the children are their parents, and they are talking of a novel the world is reading. Did Lady Audley murder her husband? Lady Audley! What a beautiful name! and she, who is a slender, pale, fairylike woman, killed her husband. Such thoughts flash through the boy's mind; his imagination is stirred and quickened, and he begs for an explanation. The coach lumbers along; it arrives at its destination, and Lady Audley is forgotten in the delight of tearing down fruit trees and killing a cat.

But when we returned home I took the first opportunity of stealing the novel in question. I read it eagerly, passionately, vehemently. I read its successor and its successor. I read until I came to a book called "The Doctor's Wife"—a lady who loved Shelley and Byron. There was magic, there was revelation in the name, and Shelley became my soul's divinity. Why did I love Shelley? Why not attracted to Byron? Shelley! That crystal name, and his poetry also crystalline. I must see it, I must know him. Escaping from the schoolroom, I ransacked the library, and at last my ardour was rewarded. The book—a small pocket edition in red boards, no doubt long out of print—opened at "The Sensitive Plant." Was I disappointed? I think I had expected to understand better; but I had no difficulty in assuming that I was satisfied and delighted. And henceforth the little volume never left my pocket, and I read the dazzling stanzas by the shores of a pale-green Irish lake, comprehending little, and loving a great deal. Byron, too, was often with me, and these poets

were the ripening influence of years otherwise merely nervous and boisterous.

And my poets were taken to school, because it pleased me to read "Queen Mab" and "Cain," amid the priests and ignorance of a hateful Roman Catholic college. And there my poets saved me from intellectual savagery; for I was incapable at that time of learning anything. What determined and incorrigible idleness! I used to gaze fondly on a book, holding my head between my hands, and allow my thoughts to wander far into dreams and thin imaginings. Neither Latin, nor Greek, nor French, nor History, nor English composition could I learn, unless, indeed, my curiosity or personal interest was excited—then I made rapid strides in that branch of knowledge to which my attention was directed. A mind hitherto dark seemed suddenly to grow clear, and it remained clear and bright as long as passion was in me; but as soon as passion died the mind began to cloud, and it remained fixed in an almost immovable obtuseness till roused again by the goad of some new impulse.

I was a boy that no schoolmaster wants, and the natural end to so wayward a temperament as mine was expulsion. I was expelled when I was sixteen, for idleness and general worthlessness, and returned to a wild country home, where I found my father engaged in training racehorses. For a nature of such intense vitality as mine, an ambition, an aspiration of some sort was necessary; and I now, as I have often done since, accepted the first ideal to hand. In this instance it was the *stable*. I was given a hunter, I rode to hounds every week, I rode gallops every morning, I read the racing calendar, stud-book, latest betting, and looked forward with enthusiasm to the day when I should be known as a successful steeplechase rider. To ride the winner of the Liverpool seemed to me a final achievement and glory; and had not accident intervened, it is very possible that I might have succeeded in carrying off, if not the meditated honour, something scarcely inferior, such as—— Alas! I cannot

now recall the name of a race of the necessary value and importance. About this time my father was elected Member of Parliament; our home was broken up, and we went to London. But an ideal set up on its pedestal is not easily displaced, and I persevered in my love, despite the poor promises London life held out for its ultimate attainment; and surreptitiously I continued to nourish it with small bets made in a small tobacconist's. Well do I remember that shop, the oily-faced, sandy-whiskered proprietor, his betting-book, the cheap cigars along the counter, the one-eyed nondescript who leaned his evening away against the counter, and was supposed to know someone who knew Lord ——'s footman, and the great man often spoken of, but rarely seen—he who made "a two-'undred-pound book on the Derby"; and the constant coming and going of the cabmen—"Half an ounce of shag, sir." I was then at a military tutor's in the Euston Road; for, in answer to my father's question as to what occupation I intended to pursue, I had consented to enter the army. In my heart I knew that when it came to the point I should refuse—the idea of military discipline was very repugnant, and the possibility of an anonymous death on a battlefield could not be accepted by so self-conscious a youth, by one so full of his own personality. I said Yes to my father, because the moral courage to say No was lacking, and I put my trust in the future, as well I might, for a fair prospect of idleness lay before me, and the chance of my passing any examination was, indeed, remote.

In London I made the acquaintance of a great blond man, who talked incessantly about beautiful women, and painted them sometimes larger than life, in somnolent attitudes, and luxurious tints. His studio was a welcome contrast to the spitting and betting of the tobacco shop. His pictures—Doré-like improvisations, devoid of skill, and, indeed, of artistic perception, save a certain sentiment for the grand and noble—filled me with wonderment and awe. "How jolly it would be to be a painter!" I once said, quite involuntarily.

"Why, would you like to be a painter?" he asked abruptly. I laughed, not suspecting that I had the slightest gift, as indeed was the case, but the idea remained in my mind, and soon after I began to make sketches in the streets and theatres. My attempts were not very successful, but they encouraged me to tell my father that I would go to the military tutor no more, and he allowed me to enter the Kensington Museum as an Art student. There, of course, I learned nothing, and, from the point of view of art merely, I had much better have continued my sketches in the streets; but the museum was a beautiful and beneficent influence, and one that applied marvellously well to the besetting danger of the moment; for in the galleries I met young men who spoke of other things than betting and steeplechase riding, who, I remember, it was clear to me then, looked to a higher ideal than mine, breathed a purer atmosphere of thought than I. And then the sweet, white peace of antiquity! The great, calm gaze that is not sadness nor joy, but something that we know not of—which is lost to the world for ever.

"But if you want to be a painter you must go to France—France is the only school of Art." I must again call attention to the phenomenon of echo-augury, that is to say, words heard in an unlooked-for quarter, that, without any appeal to our reason, impel belief. France! The word rang in my ears and gleamed in my eyes. France! All my senses sprang from sleep like a crew when the man on the look-out cries, "Land ahead!" Instantly I knew that I should, that I must, go to France, that I would live there, that I would become as a Frenchman. I knew not when nor how, but I knew I should go to France. . . .

So my youth ran into manhood, finding its way from rock to rock like a rivulet, gathering strength at each leap. One day my father was suddenly called to Ireland. A few days after a telegram came, and my mother read that we were required at his bedside. We journeyed over land and sea; and on a bleak country road, one winter's evening, a man ap-

proached us, and I heard him say that all was over, that my father was dead. I loved my father; and yet my soul said, "I am glad." The thought came unbidden, undesired, and I turned aside, shocked at the sight it afforded of my soul.

O my father, I, who love and reverence nothing else, love and reverence thee; thou art the one pure image in my mind, the one true affection that life has not broken or soiled; I remember thy voice and thy kind, happy ways. All I have of worldly goods and native wit I received from thee—and was it I who was glad? No, it was not I; I had no concern in the thought that then fell upon me unbidden and undesired; my individual voice can give you but praise and loving words; and the voice that said "I am glad" was not my voice, but that of the will to live which we inherit from elemental dust through countless generations. Terrible and imperative is the voice of the will to live: let him who is innocent cast the first stone.

Terrible is the day when each sees his soul naked, stripped of all veil; that dear soul which he cannot change or discard, and which is so irreparably his.

My father's death freed me, and I sprang like a loosened bough up to the light. His death gave me power to create myself—that is to say, to create a complete and absolute self out of the partial self which was all that the restraint of home had permitted; this future self, this ideal George Moore, beckoned me, lured like a ghost; and as I followed the funeral the question, Would I sacrifice this ghostly self, if by so doing I should bring my father back? presented itself without intermission, and I shrank horrified at the answer which I could not crush out of mind.

Now my life was like a garden in the emotive torpor of spring; now my life was like a flower conscious of the light. Money was placed in my hands, and I divined all it represented. Before me the crystal lake, the distant mountains, the swaying woods, said but one word, and that word was—self; not the self that was then mine, but the self on whose

creation I was enthusiastically determined. But I felt like a murderer when I turned to leave the place which I had so suddenly, and I could not but think unjustly, become possessed of. As I probe this poignant psychological moment, I find that, although I perfectly well realized that all pleasures were then in my reach—women, elegant dress, theatres, and supper-rooms—I hardly thought at all of them, but much more of certain drawings from the plaster cast. I would be an artist. More than ever I was determined to be an artist, and my brain was made of this desire as I journeyed as fast as railway and steamboat could take me to London. No further trammels, no further need of being a soldier, of being anything but eighteen, with life and France before me! I would feel the pulse of life at home before I felt it abroad, and a studio rose up in my imagination—tapestries, models and preparations for France.

It is difficult to tell the whole truth, and to avoid conveying a false impression; and I fain would show my soul in these pages, like a face in a pool of clear water. Looked at from one side my studio was in truth no more than an amusement, a means of effectually throwing over all restraint; but I did not view it from this side. My studio was my adventure; a certain Botticelli in the National Gallery held me; and when I look back and consider this past, I am forced to admit that I might have grown up in less fortunate circumstances, for even the studio, with its dissipations—and they were many—was not unserviceable; it developed the natural man, who educates himself, who allows his mind to grow and ripen under the sun and wind of modern life, in contradistinction to the University man, who is fed upon the dust of ages, and after a formula which has been composed to suit the requirements of the average human being.

Nor was my reading at this time so limited as might be expected from the foregoing. The study of Shelley's poetry had led me to read very nearly all the English lyric poets; Shelley's atheism had led me to read Kant, Spinoza, Godwin,

Darwin, and Mill. So it will be understood that Shelley not only gave me my first soul, but led all its first flights. But I do not think that if Shelley had been no more than a poet, notwithstanding my very genuine love of verse, he would have gained such influence in my youthful sympathies; but Shelley dreamed in metaphysics—very thin dreaming if you will; but just such thin dreaming as I could follow. Was there or was there not a God? And for many years I could not dismiss as parcel of the world's folly this question, and sought a solution, inclining towards atheism, for it was natural in me to oppose the routine of daily thought. I think it was in my early teens, soon after my expulsion from Oscott for refusing to confess, that I resolved to tell my mother that I believed no longer in a God. She was leaning against the chimney-piece in the drawing-room; but although a religious woman, my mother did not seem in the least frightened, she only said, "I am very sorry, George, it is so," and I was deeply shocked at her indifference.

Finding music and atheism in poetry, I cared little for novels. Scott seemed to me on a par with Burke's speeches; that is to say, too impersonal for my very personal taste. Dickens I knew by heart, and *Bleak House* I thought his greatest achievement. Thackeray left no deep impression on my mind; in no way did he hold my thoughts. He was not picturesque, like Dickens, and his social satire seemed very small beer to me eager for some adequate philosophy of life. Adequate! a word of my youth when I hungered after great truths: *Middlemarch*, *Adam Bede*, *The Rise and Influence of Rationalism*, *The History of Civilization*, were momentous events in my life. But life was loved better than books, and very curiously my studies and my pleasures kept pace, stepping together like a pair of well-trained carriage horses: while waiting for my coach to take a party of *tarts* and *mashers* to the Derby, I would read a chapter of Kant, and put the book into my pocket in the hope of finding a few spare moments to devote to it on the racecourse. I liked to

spend on scent and toilette knick-knacks as much as would keep a poor man's family in affluence for ten months; I liked the fashionable sunlight in the Park, the dusty cavalcades—and to shock my friends by bowing to those to whom I should not bow. I cultivated with care the acquaintance of a neighbour who had taken the Globe Theatre for the purpose of producing Offenbach's operas. Bouquets, stalls, rings, delighted me; and of all, the life of the theatre—that life of raw gaslight, whitewashed walls, of doggerel verse, slangy polkas and waltzes—interested me beyond legitimate measure, so curious and unreal did it seem. I lived at home, but dined daily at a fashionable restaurant: at half past eight I was at the theatre. Nodding familiarly to the door-keeper, I passed up the long passage to the stage. Afterwards supper. Cremorne and the Argyle Rooms were my favourite haunts. My mother suffered, and expected ruin, for I took no trouble to conceal anything; I boasted of dissipations. But there was no need to fear, for I was naturally endowed with a very clear sense of self-preservation; I neither betted nor drank, nor contracted debts, nor a secret marriage; from a worldly point of view, I was a model young man indeed; and when I returned home about four in the morning, I watched the pale moon setting, and, repeating some verses of Shelley, I thought how I should go to Paris when I was of age and study painting.

CHAP. II

At last the day came, and with several trunks and boxes full of clothes, books, and pictures, I started, accompanied by an Irish valet, for Paris and Art.

We all know the great grey and melancholy Gare du Nord at half past six in the morning; and the miserable carriages, and the tall, haggard city. Pale, sloppy, yellow houses; an oppressive absence of colour; a peculiar bleakness in the streets. The *ménagère* hurries down the asphalt to the market; a dreadful *garçon de café*, with a napkin tied round

his throat, moves about some chairs, so decrepit and so solitary that it seems impossible to imagine a human being sitting there. Where are the Boulevards? where are the Champs Elysées? I asked myself; and feeling bound to apologize for the appearance of the city, I explained to my valet that we were passing through some by-streets, and returned to the study of a French vocabulary. Nevertheless, when the time came to formulate a demand for rooms, hot water, and a fire, I broke down, and the proprietress of the hotel, who spoke English, had to be sent for. My plans, so far as I had any, were to study painting in Cabanel's studio. A satyr breaking through some branches carrying a woman in his arms had inspired an endless admiration, and his picture of Dante sitting on a bench under a wall reading to a frightened audience, increased my desire to identify myself with his vision; to feel the thrill of the girl's shoulder, as no doubt he had when she shrank back into her lover's protection, frightened by the poet's relation of what he had seen in hell. But to go to Cabanel before I could speak French were useless, and at the end of three weeks my patience was exhausted; and three weeks are a short time to master a sufficient number of French phrases to explain my mission.

The man that received me with unaffected courtesy was of medium height, with square and rather high shoulders, and his square-cut beard and a certain nobility of countenance, like that of a lion, are among my remembrances of the great painter who listened in March, 1873, with patience to my praise of *The Florentine Poet*. He gave attentive ear to my jargon, and discovering in it a very genuine admiration of his beautiful decoration for the Louvre hanging on the end wall of his studio, he looked at my drawings, and tried to make plain that he could not take me as a private pupil, having no studio except the one we stood in. It seemed to me that a distant corner would suit me very well, but feeling that I should be in the way of his models and his patrons, I was about to retire apologetically. He stopped me, however, and

once more I applied myself to the task of understanding the instruction he seemed bent upon giving: he was one of the professors of the Beaux Arts, and the best thing for me to do would be to make application at the Embassy; no doubt my Ambassador would be able to obtain for me the right of entrance without examination. "He thinks that my drawings are not good enough to get me through," I said to myself as I hastened away in a cab to tell my story to Lord Lyons, an elegant old gentleman, who promised to intercede on my behalf with Le Ministre des Beaux Arts. A few days later an official letter was handed to me, and the morning after I introduced myself to many turbulent fellows whose aspects and manners soon convinced me that I would not be able to endure the life of the Beaux Arts, and that the facilities the schools afforded were not those that I sought for.

The model sits only three times a week: the other days we worked from the plaster cast; and to be there by seven o'clock in the morning required so painful an effort of will, that I glanced in terror down the dim and grey perspective of early risings that awaited me; then, demoralized by the lassitude of Sunday, I told my valet on Monday morning to leave the room, that I would return to the Beaux Arts no more. He tried to persuade me to rise, and on my refusal to do so, his orders being explicit, he snatched the bedclothes from me and ran away with them and locked them up in another room, leaving me naked and humiliated at my own weakness, for much hope had been centred in Cabanel's influence and example. To abandon the Beaux Arts was to abandon Cabanel, and day after day I walked up and down the Boulevards studying the photographs of the salon pictures, trying to find a painter to whom I might address myself with confidence. I had never forgotten my father showing me, one day when he was shaving, three photographs from pictures. They were by an artist called Sevres. My father liked the slenderer figure, but I liked the corpulent—the Venus standing at the corner of a wood, pouring wine into a

goblet, while Cupid, from behind her satin-enveloped knees, drew his bow and shot the doves that flew from listening poplar trees. The beauty of this woman, and what her beauty must be in the life of the painter, had inspired many a reverie, and I had concluded—this conclusion being of all others most sympathetic to me—that she was his very beautiful mistress, that they lived in a picturesque happiness in the midst of a shady garden full of birds and tall flowers. She had haunted my imagination in white muslin with wide sleeves open to the elbow, scattering grain from a silver plate to the proud pigeons that strutted about her slippered feet and fluttered to her dove-like hand ; and these dreams of her had accompanied me in my rides over the plains of Mayo, and in London I conceived a project of becoming Sevres's pupil and being loved by her !

What coming and going, what inquiries, what difficulties, arose ! At last I was advised to go to the Exposition aux Champs Elysées and seek his address in the catalogue ; and while the concierge copied out the address for me, I chased his tame magpie that hopped about one of the angles of the great building, for I was a childish boy of one-and-twenty who knew nothing, and to whom the world was astonishingly new. I have often thought that before my soul was given to me it had been plunged deep in Lethe, and as an almost virgin man I stood in front of Enghien—a suburb not far from Paris, the pretty French country seeming to me like a fairy-book. There were tall green poplars, and a little lake reflected the foliage and the stems of sapling oak and pine, just as in the pictures. The driver pointed with his whip, and I saw a high garden wall shadowed with young trees, and a loose iron gate, and passing through the gate I walked up the gravelled path, looking around for the beautiful mistress who I felt should feed pigeons from a silver plate, asking myself if Monsieur Sevres would invite me to breakfast. A maid-servant opened the door. She showed me into the studio, and before I had time to make examination of the few

sketches on the walls Monsieur Sevres came in, a tall, reedy-looking man, who did not wear the appearance of genius like Cabanel. But as the object of my visit was his mistress as much as himself, I prolonged the conversation as far as my knowledge of the French language allowed me. His pictures were all in the Salon, he said, but he drew forth a few sketches, and told me, as Cabanel had done, that he had no room for a pupil in his house. Whereupon I proposed to him that I should take a house in Enghien. "Were there houses to let?" He said there were many, and that if I took one he would have much pleasure in walking over and instructing me. But being by no means sure that Monsieur Sevres had a mistress, I avoided a direct answer, saying that I would write and let him know as soon as I had found a house; and answering that he hoped that I would find one that suited me, he conducted me down the green garden. "I've seen these trees before in your pictures," I said, scanning every nook, hoping that I should see her reading, and that she would raise her eyes as I passed.

It seems to me that I did catch sight of a white dress behind a trellis, but the dress that I saw or imagined may have been worn by his daughter or by his wife. However this may be, Sevres's mistress, if he had one, was not discovered by me that day nor any other day. I never saw him again. He had proven somewhat of a disappointment, and the woman, I reflected, who had sat for the pictures that had stirred my childish imaginations in Mayo may have been painted long ago. "The woman is perhaps an old woman now," I said to myself as the train entered Paris. "But even so, I shall have to learn painting from somebody"; and next day I returned to Enghien with my taciturn valet, who showed no enthusiasm on the subject of Enghien, and was at no pains to disguise from me the fact that he was but little disposed to settle in this French suburb.

We were both very much alone in Paris. In the evenings I allowed him to smoke his clay in my room, and in an

astounding brogue he counselled me to return to my mother. But I would not listen, and one day on the Boulevards I was stricken with the art of Jules Lefebvre. True it is that I saw it was wanting in that tender grace which I am forced to admit even now, saturated though I now am with the æsthetics of different schools, is inherent in Cabanel's work; but at the time I am writing of my nature was too young and mobile to resist the conventional attractiveness of nude figures, indolent attitudes, long hair, slender hips and hands, and I accepted Jules Lefebvre wholly and unconditionally. He hesitated, however, when I asked to be taken as a private pupil; but he wrote out the address of a studio where he gave instruction every Tuesday morning, and as no one seemed anxious to have me in his studio I fell to thinking that perhaps a pubic studio would suit me better, for in it I would meet all kinds and conditions of Frenchmen, and in their society I would have a better chance of learning the language and assimilating the spirit of France.

The studio to which I had been recommended was perched high up in the Passage des Panoramas, and in it I found M. Julien, a typical meridional: dark eyes, crafty and watchful, a seductively mendacious manner, and a sensual mind. We made friends at once—he consciously making use of me, I unconsciously making use of him. To him my forty francs, a month's subscription, were a godsend, nor were my invitations to dinner and to the theatre to be disdained, though to be sure it was a little tiresome to have to put up with a talkative person, whose knowledge of the French language had been acquired in three months; but the dinners were good, and I was quaint. No doubt Julien reasoned so; I did not reason at all, but I felt this crafty, clever man of the world was necessary to me. I had never met such a man before, and all my curiosity was awake. He spoke of art and literature, of the world and the flesh; he told me of the books he had read, he narrated thrilling incidents in his own life; and the moral reflections with which he sprinkled his con-

versation I thought very striking. Like every young man of twenty, I was on the look-out for something to set up that would do duty for an ideal. The world was to me, at this time, what a toy-shop had been fifteen years before: everything was spick and span, and every illusion was set out straight and smart in new paint and gilding. Julien threw open a door of Parisian life to me; all open doors were welcome to me at that time, and his society served to prepare my mind for the friendship which awaited me, and which was destined to absorb some years of my life.

In the studio there were some eighteen or twenty young men, and among these there were some four or five from whom I could learn; there were also some eight or nine young English girls. We sat round in a circle and drew from the model. And this reversal of all the world's opinions and prejudices was to me singularly delightful; I loved the sense of unreality that the exceptional nature of our life in this studio conveyed. Besides, the women themselves were young and interesting, and were, therefore, one of the charms of the place, giving, as they did, that sense of sex which is so subtle a mental pleasure, and which is, in its outward aspect, so interesting to the eye—the gowns, the hair lifted, showing the neck; the earrings, the sleeves open at the elbow. Though all this was very dear to me, I did not fall in love: but he who escapes a woman's dominion generally comes under the sway of some friend who ever exerts a strange attractiveness, and fosters a sort of dependency that is not healthful or valid: and although I look back with undiminished delight on the friendship I contracted about this time—a friendship which permeated and added to my life—I am nevertheless forced to recognize that, however suitable it may have been in my special case, in the majority of instances it would have proved but a shipwrecking reef, on which a young man's life would have gone to pieces. What saved me was the intensity of my passion for Art, and a moral revolt against any action that I thought could or would

definitely compromise me in that direction. I was willing to stray a little from my path, but never further than a single step, which I could retrace when I pleased.

One day I raised my eyes, and saw a newcomer in the studio; and painting very well indeed, to my surprise, my experience not having led me to believe in the marriage of genius and well-cut clothes. His shoulders showed beautiful and broad; and above them were a long neck, a tiny head, a narrow, thin face, and large eyes, full of intelligence and fascination. Although he could not have been working more than an hour, he had already sketched in his figure, with all the surroundings—screens, lamps, stoves, his facility interesting me deeply. I asked the young lady next me if she knew who he was. She could not tell me. At four o'clock there was a general exodus from the studio; we adjourned to a neighbouring *café* to drink beer; and as we stooped under an archway, the young man (Marshall was his name) spoke to me in English. Was my name Moore, and had we not exchanged a few words in So-and-So's studio—So-and-So was the great blond man whose Doré-like improvisations had awakened aspiration in me.

The usual reflections on the chances of life were of course made, and then followed the inevitable "Will you dine with me to-night?" Marshall thought the following day would suit him better, but I was very pressing. He offered to meet me at my hotel; or would I come with him to his rooms; he would show me some pictures—some trifles he had brought up from the country? Nothing would please me better. We got into a cab. Then every moment revealed new qualities, new superiorities, in my friend. Tall, strong, handsome, beautifully dressed, and talking French like a native, he continued to invade and capture my imagination. He said it was only natural that he should speak French, for he was born in Brussels and had lived there all his life, but the accident of birth rather stimulated than calmed my pride in being seen in his company. He spoke of the fashionable

restaurants and actresses; he stopped at a hairdresser's to have his hair curled, and I was on tiptoe of expectation to see his apartments.

His apartments were not so grand as I expected; but when he explained that he had just spent ten thousand pounds in two years, and was now living on six or seven hundred francs a month, which his mother would allow him until he had painted and had sold a certain series of pictures, which he contemplated beginning at once, my admiration increased to wonder, and I examined with awe the great fireplace which had been constructed at his orders, and admired the iron pot which hung by a chain above an artificial bivouac fire. This detail will suggest the rest of the studio—the Turkey carpet, the brass harem lamps, the Japanese screen, the pieces of drapery, the oak chairs covered with red Utrecht velvet, the oak wardrobe that had been picked up somewhere—a ridiculous bargain—and the inevitable bed with spiral columns. There were vases filled with foreign grasses, and palms stood in the corners of the rooms. Marshall pulled out a few pictures; but he paid very little heed to my compliments; and sitting down at the piano, with a great deal of splashing and dashing about the keys, he rattled off a waltz.

"What waltz is that?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing; something I composed the other evening. I had a fit of the blues, and didn't go out. What do you think of it?"

"I think it beautiful; did you really compose that the other evening?"

At this moment a knock was heard at the door, and Marshall introduced me to a beautiful English girl. With looks that see nothing, and words that mean nothing, an amorous woman receives the man she finds with her sweetheart. But it subsequently transpired that Alice had an appointment; she was dining out; but would, however, call in the morning and give him a sitting for the portrait he was painting of her.

I had hitherto worked very regularly at the studio, but

Marshall's society was an attraction that could not be resisted. A long truancy began, and while regretting my own inconstancy, I deplored my friend's idleness, and besought him to return to work for the sake of his talent, which I believed in. But Alice's beauty held him; a winning dissipation it was, and his delight in her was thorough, and his gay, dashing manner made me feel happy, and his experience opened to me new avenues for enjoyment and knowledge of life.

On my arrival in Paris I had visited, in the company of my taciturn valet, the Mabille and the Valentino, and had dined at the Maison d'Or by myself; but Marshall took me to strange students' *cafés*, where dinners were paid for in pictures; to a mysterious place, where a *table d'hôte* was held under a tent in a back garden, frequented by the lights of love of Montmartre, with whom we went to walk in the gardens of *Bullier*, the *Château Rouge*, or the *Elysée Montmartre*.

It often seemed to me that Marshall was not conscious of the fantastic greenness of the foliage under the gaslights, or of the unreality of the life we were leading in the company of women, known only to us by their Christian names. He took it all for granted, whereas I lived it in my imagination, exalted by the clangour of the band, and thronging of the dancers, and of all by the returning home in open carriages through the close, warm night, the darkness chequered by an ostrich-feather hanging over the hood of the carriage in front of us, an edge of skirt passing beyond the foot-board. "She is in his arms," I said. "Does she love him?" I asked, and watched the moon and compared it to a magic-lantern hanging out of the sky.

Now we seemed to live in fiacres and restaurants, and the afternoons were filled with febrile impressions. Marshall had a friend in this street, and another in that. It was only necessary for him to cry "Stop" to the coachman, and to run up two or three flights of stairs. . . .

"*Madame* ——, *est-elle chez elle?*"

"*Oui, Monsieur ; si Monsieur veut se donner la peine d'entrer.*" And we were shown into a handsomely furnished apartment. A lady would enter hurriedly, and an animated discussion was begun. I did not know French sufficiently well to follow the conversation, but I remember it always commenced *mon cher ami*, and was plentifully sprinkled with the phrase *vous avez tort*. The ladies themselves had only just returned from Constantinople or Japan, and they were generally involved in mysterious lawsuits, or were busily engaged in prosecuting claims for several millions of francs against different foreign Governments.

And just as I had watched the chorus girls and mummers, three years ago, at the Globe Theatre, now, excited by a nervous curiosity, I watched this world of Parisian adventurers and lights'-o-love. And this craving for observation of manners, this instinct for the rapid notation of gestures and words that epitomize a state of feeling, of attitudes that mirror forth the soul, declared itself a main passion ; and it grew and strengthened, to the detriment of the other Art still so dear to me. With the patience of a cat before a mouse-hole, I watched and listened, picking one characteristic phrase out of hours of vain chatter, interested and amused by an angry or loving glance. These men and women seemed to me like the midges that fret the surface of a shadowy stream, and though I laughed and danced, and made merry with them, I was not of them. But with Marshall it was different : they were my amusement, they were his necessary pleasure. And I knew of this distinction that made twain our lives ; and I reflected deeply upon it. Why could I not live without an ever-present and acute consciousness of life ? Why could I not love, forgetful of the ticking of the clock in the perfumed silence of the chamber ?

And so my friend became to me a study, a subject for dissection. The general attitude of his mind and its various turns, all the apparent contradictions, and how they could be explained, classified, and reduced to one primary law, were to

me a constant source of thought. Our confidences knew no reserve. I say our confidences, because to obtain confidences it is often necessary to confide. All we saw, heard, read or felt was the subject of mutual confidences : the transitory emotion that a flush of colour and a bit of perspective awakens, the blue tints that the summer sunset lends to a white dress, or the eternal verities, death and love. But, although I tested every fibre of thought and analysed every motive, I was very sincere in my friendship and very loyal in my admiration. Nor did my admiration wane when I discovered that Marshall was shallow in his appreciations, superficial in his judgments, that his talents did not pierce below the surface ; *il avait si grand air*, there was fascination in his very bearing, in his large, soft, colourful eyes, and a go and dash in his dissipations that carried me away.

To anyone observing us at this time it would have seemed that I was but a hanger-on, and a feeble imitator of Marshall. I took him to my tailor's, and he advised me on the cut of my coats ; he showed me how to arrange my rooms, and I strived to copy his manner of speech and his general bearing ; and yet I think that I always suspected that Marshall's brilliancy was owing to the superficiality of his talent, and that my nature was a deeper one than his, and would become deeper as the years went by. I think I was conscious that I was growing, and that Marshall, already arrived at maturity, could teach me. And I used him without shame or stint, as I have used all those with whom I have been brought into close contact. I cannot recall a case of man or woman who ever occupied any considerable part of my thoughts that did not contribute towards my moral or physical welfare. In other words, and in very colloquial language, I never had useless friends hanging about me. I am afraid the thoughtless reader will at once judge me rapacious, egoistical, false, fawning, mendacious. Well, I may be all this and more, but not because all who have known me have rendered me eminent services. I can say that no one ever formed relation-

ships in life with less design than myself. I never gave a thought to the advantage that might accrue from being on terms of friendship with this man and avoiding that one. "Then how do you explain," cries the angry reader, "that you have never had a friend by whom you did not profit? You must have had very few friends." On the contrary, I have had many friends, and of all sorts and kinds—men and women: and, I repeat, none took part in my life who did not contribute something towards my well-being. It must, of course, be understood that I make no distinction between mental and material help; and in my case the one has at all times been adjuvant to the other. "Pooh, pooh!" again exclaims the reader: "I for one will not believe that chance has sent across your way only the people who were required to assist you." Chance! Dear reader, is there such a thing as chance? Do you believe in chance? Do you attach any precise meaning to the word? Do you employ it at haphazard, allowing it to mean what it may? Chance! What a field for psychical investigation is at once opened up; how we may tear to shreds our past lives in search of—what? Of the Chance that made us. I think, reader, I can throw some light on the general question, by replying to your taunt: Chance, or the conditions of life under which we live, sent, of course, thousands of creatures across my way who were powerless to benefit me; but then an instinct of which I knew nothing, of which I was not even conscious, withdrew me from them, and I was attracted to others. Have you not seen a horse suddenly leave a corner of a field to seek pasturage farther away?

Never could I interest myself in a book if it were not the exact diet my mind required at the time, or in the very immediate future. The mind asked, received, and digested. so much was assimilated, so much expelled; then, after a season, similar demands were made, the same processes were repeated out of sight, below consciousness, as is the case in a well-ordered stomach. Shelley, who fired my youth with

passion, and purified and upbore it for so long, is now to me as nothing: not a dead or faded thing, but a thing out of which I personally have drawn all the sustenance I can draw from him; and, therefore, it (that part which I did not absorb) concerns me no more. And the same with Gautier. Mlle. de Maupin, that desire not "of the moth for the star," but for such perfection of arm and thigh as leaves passion breathless and fain of tears, is now, if I take up the book and read, weary and ragged as a spider's web, that has hung the winter through in the dusty, forgotten corner of a forgotten room. My old rapture and my youth's delight I can regain only when I think of that part of Gautier which is now incarnate in me.

As I picked up books, so I picked up my friends. I read friends and books with the same passion, with the same avidity; and as I discarded my books when I had assimilated as much of them as my system required, so I discarded my friends when they ceased to be of use to me. I employ the word "use" in its fullest, not in its limited and twenty-shilling sense. This parallel of the intellect to the blind unconsciousness of the lower organs will strike some as a violation of man's best beliefs, and as saying very little for the particular intellect that can be so reduced. But I am not sure these people are right. I am inclined to think that as you ascend the scale of thought to the great minds, these unaccountable impulses, mysterious resolutions, sudden, but certain knowings, falling whence or how it is impossible to say, but falling somehow into the brain, instead of growing rarer, become more and more frequent; indeed, I think that if the really great man were to confess to the working of his mind, we should see him constantly besieged by inspirations . . . inspirations! Ah! how human thought only turns in a circle, and how, when we think we are on the verge of a new thought, we slip into the enunciation of some time-worn truth. But let general principles be waived; for it will suffice for the interest of these pages

if it be understood that brain instincts have always been, and still are, the initial and the determining powers of my being.

CHAP. III

But the studio, to which I had returned and where I had been working for the last three or four months so diligently, became wearisome to me, for two reasons. It deprived me of many hours of Marshall's company. The second reason is the graver, because I was beginning to regard the delineation of a nymph, or youth bathing, as a very narrow channel to carry off the strong, full tide of a man's thought. Thoughts of love and death, and the hopelessness of life, were active within me, and I yearned to give direct expression to my pain. In youth all thoughts seem new, and we are ridiculously subjective; our eyes are always turned inwards; and the creatures whom I met in the ways and by-ways of Parisian life, whose gestures and attitudes I devoured with my eyes, and whose souls I hungered to know, awoke in me a tense, irresponsible curiosity, but that was all; I despised, I hated them, thought them contemptible, and to select them as subjects of artistic treatment could not then, might never, have occurred to me had the suggestion to do so not come direct to me from the outside.

At the time of which I am writing I lived in an old-fashioned hotel on the Boulevard, which an enterprising Belgian had lately bought and was endeavouring to modernize; an old-fashioned hotel, that still clung to its ancient character in the presence of half a dozen old people, who, from habit, continued to dine on certain well-specified days at the *table d'hôte*. Fifteen years have passed away, and these old people, no doubt, are among the gone; but I can see them still sitting in that *salle à manger*, the *buffets en vieux chêne*, the opulent candelabra *en style d'Empire*, the waiter lighting the gas

in the pale Parisian evening. The tall, thin, hatchet-faced American has dined at this *table d'hôte* for the last thirty years, and he is talkative, vain, foolish, and authoritative. The clean, neatly dressed old gentleman who sits by him, looking so much like a French gentleman, has spent a great part of his life in Spain. With that piece of news, and its subsequent developments, our acquaintance with him begins and ends ; the eyes, the fan, the mantilla, how it began, how it was broken off, and how it began again. Opposite sits another French gentleman, with beard and bristly hair. He spent twenty years of his life in India, and he talks of his son who has been out there for the last ten, and who has just returned home. There is the Italian countesse of sixty summers, who dresses like a girl of sixteen and smokes a cigar after dinner—if there are not too many strangers in the room. A stranger she calls anyone whom she has not seen at least once before. The little fat, neckless man, with the great bald head, fringed below the ears with hair, is M. Duval. He is a dramatic author, the author of a hundred and sixty plays. He does not obtrude himself on your notice, but when you speak to him on literary matters he fixes a pair of tiny, sloe-like eyes on you, and talks affably of his collaborateurs.

I was soon deeply interested in M. Duval, and one day ventured to invite him to come to the *café* after dinner, where after paying for his coffee and liqueurs I offered him a choice cigar. He did not smoke ; I did, and we fell to talking of the drama. It was, of course, inevitable that I should find out in this or some subsequent conversation that he had not had a play produced for the last twenty years, but then the aureole of the hundred and sixty was about his poor bald head. I thought of the chances of life, he alluded to the war ; and so this unpleasantness was passed over, and we entered on more pleasing subjects of conversation. He had written plays with everybody ; his list of collaborateurs was longer than any list of lady patronesses for an English county ball ; there was no literary kitchen in which he had not

helped to dish up. I was at once amazed and delighted. Had M. Duval written his hundred and sixty plays in the seclusion of his own rooms, I should have been less surprised; it was the mystery of the *séances* of collaboration, the trysts, the discussion, the illustrious company, that overwhelmed me in a rapture of wonder and respectful admiration. Then came the anecdotes. They were of all sorts. Here are a few specimens: He, Duval, had written a one-act piece with Dumas *père;* it had been refused at the Français, and then it had been about, here, there, and everywhere; finally the *Variétés* had asked for some alterations, and *c'était une affaire entendue.* "I made the alterations one afternoon, and wrote to Dumas, and what do you think?—by return of post I had a letter from him saying he could not consent to the production of a one-act piece, signed by him, at the *Variétés*, because his son was then giving a five-act piece at the Gymnase." Then came a string of indecent witticisms by Suzanne Lagier and Dejazet. They were as old as the world, but they were new to me, and I was amused and astonished. These *bons mots* were followed by an account of how Gautier wrote his Sunday feuilleton, and how he and Balzac had once nearly come to blows. They had agreed to collaborate. Balzac was to contribute the scenario, Gautier the dialogue. One morning Balzac came with the scenario of the first act. "Here it is, Gautier! I suppose you can let me have it back finished by to-morrow afternoon?" And the old gentleman would chirp along in this fashion till midnight. I would then accompany him to his rooms in the Quartier Montmartre—rooms high up on the fifth floor—where, between two pictures, supposed to be by Angelica Kauffmann, M. Duval had written unactable plays for the last twenty years, and where he would continue to write unactable plays until God called him to a world, perhaps, of eternal cantatas, but where, by all accounts, *l'exposition de la pièce selon la formule de M. Scribe* is still unknown.

How I used to enjoy these conversations! I remember

how I used to stand on the pavement after having bidden the old gentleman good-night, regretting I had not asked for some further explanation regarding *le mouvement romantique*, or *la façon de M. Scribe de ménager la situation*.

Why not write a comedy? For the plot take Marshall for hero and Alice for heroine, and surround them with the old gentlemen who dine at the *table d'hôte*, and the Italian countess who smokes cigars when there are not too many strangers present; they will supply the needed satiric or comic element. After some stirring, these ingredients began to simmer into something resembling a plot. But to put it upon paper was the rub. "Cain," "Manfred," and "The Cenci," had been read as poems without thinking how the dialogue looked upon paper; besides, they were in blank verse, and prose dialogue would look quite different. As no instinctive want had urged me to read Shakespeare, he remained unread, and I did not turn to him now because of the excessive popularity of his name, but went instead to the Gymnase, and gave an attentive hearing to the play, which, however, did not enable me to see the dialogue upon paper. A corner of the prompter's copy was visible from the stall I sat in; a peep into it would reveal the secret of play-writing to me, but to seek out the prompter's acquaintance would mean a long delay, and being in a hurry, I betook myself to Galignani's library in quest of a book that would assist me, and after a month's study of Congreve, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar, Marshall's attempt to marry his mistress to one of his friends was related in three acts. The title given to the comedy was "Worldliness." My valet liked it, seeing in it the means whereby he might get back to London; and we returned to London, my valet thinking of the happy evenings that awaited him in the Sun Music Hall at Knightsbridge, myself of the rehearsals at the Olympic, the Globe, or the Gaiety. It did not matter which; my comedy would suit any West End theatre.

CHAP. IV

It is always difficult to get past a stage-door keeper, and it is disappointing to find in him a rival dramatist, which I did at the Olympic. A copyist of plays, mine was, as well as a writer, and while waiting I learnt among other things that it would be well to have my play copied and the stage directions inscribed in red ink. These things he undertook to do for the play that I hoped Mr. Nevill would read; and he performed the same good offices for another play which my friend, Dick Mansell, would have produced if he had not just taken the St. James's for the production of Offenbach's "Bridge of Sighs."

We had good times behind the scenes of the St. James's, and it was not till the backers refused to supply any more money and the theatre had to be closed that I was seized with a longing for Paris, and returned there hurriedly, hardly able to bear with the hours that separated me from Marshall.

"M. Marshall, is he at home?" "M. Marshall left here some months ago." "Do you know his address?" "I'll ask my husband." "Do you know M. Marshall's address?" "Yes, he's gone to live in the Rue de Douai." "What number?" "I think it is fifty-four." "Thanks." "Coachman, wake up; drive me to the Rue de Douai."

But Marshall was not to be found at the Rue de Douai; and he had left no address. There was nothing for it but to go to the studio; I should be able to obtain news of him there—perhaps find him. But when I pulled aside the curtain, the accustomed piece of slim nakedness did not greet my eyes, only the blue apron of an old woman enveloped in a cloud of dust. "The gentlemen are not here to-day, the studio is closed, I am sweeping up." "Oh, and where is M. Julien?" "I cannot say, sir: perhaps at the *café*, or perhaps he is gone to the country." This was not very encouraging, and now, my

enthusiasm thoroughly damped, I strolled along *le Passage* looking at the fans, the bangles and the litter of cheap trinkets that each window was filled with. On the left at the corner of the Boulevard was our *café*. As I came forward the waiter moved one of the tin tables, and then I saw the fat Provençal. But just as if he had seen me yesterday he said, "*Tiens! c'est vous; une demi-tasse? oui . . . garçon, une demi-tasse.*" Presently the conversation turned on Marshall; they had not seen much of him lately. "*Il paraît qu'il est plus amoureux que jamais,*" Julien replied sardonically. And I learnt from him that Alice Howard had become one of the celebrated lights o' love in Paris, Cora Pearl's rival, and was now living in the Rue Duphot.

"Number 14," Julien cried after me; and a few minutes after I found Marshall in a vast apartment, cumbered with sofas, armchairs, mirrors, and great gilt cornices, wallowing in the finest of fine linen—in a great Louis XV bed, and there were cupids above him. "Hulloa! what, you back again, George Moore? we thought we weren't going to see you again."

"It's nearly one o'clock; get up. What's the news?"

"To-day is the opening of the exhibition of the Impressionists. We'll breakfast round the corner, at Durand's, and go on there. I hear that Bedlam is nothing to it; at one end of the room there is a canvas twenty feet square and in three tints; pale yellow for the sunlight, brown for the shadows, and all the rest is sky-blue. A lady walks, I'm told, in the foreground with a ring-tailed monkey, and the tail is said to be three yards long."

We went to jeer a group of enthusiasts that willingly forfeit all delights of the world in the hope of realizing a new æstheticism; we went insolent with patent-leather shoes and bright kid gloves and armed with all the jargon of the school. "*Cette jambe ne porte pas*"; "*la nature ne se fait pas comme ça*"; "*on dessine par les masses; combien de têtes?*" "*Sept et demi.*" "*Si j'avais un morceau de craie je mettrais celle-là dans un*

bocal; c'est un fœtus"; in a word all that the journals of culture are pleased to term an artistic education. We indulged in boisterous laughter, exaggerated in the hope of giving as much pain as possible, and deep down in our souls we knew that we were lying—at least I did.

In the beginning of this century the tradition of French art—the tradition of Boucher, Fragonard, and Watteau—had been completely lost; having produced genius, their art died. Ingres is the sublime flower of the classic art which succeeded the art of the palace and the boudoir: further than Ingres it was impossible to go, and his art died. Then the Turners and Constables came to France, and they begot Troyon, and Troyon begot Millet, Courbet, Corot, and Rousseau, and these in turn begot Degas, Pissarro, Madame Morizot and Guillaumin. Degas is a pupil of Ingres, but he applies the marvellous acuteness of drawing he learned from his master to delineating the humblest aspects of modern life. Degas draws not by the masses, but by the character; his subjects are shop-girls, ballet-girls, and washerwomen, but the qualities that endow them with immortality are precisely those which eternalize the virgins and saints of Leonardo da Vinci in the minds of men. You see the fat, vulgar woman in the long cloak trying on a hat in front of the pier-glass. So marvellously well are the lines of her face observed and rendered that you can tell exactly what her position in life is; you know what the furniture of her rooms is like; you know what she would say to you if she were to speak. She is as typical of the nineteenth century as Fragonard's ladies are of the Court of Louis XV. To the right you see a picture of two shop-girls with bonnets in their hands. So accurately are the habitual movements of the heads and the hands observed that you at once realize the years of bonnet-showing and servile words that these women have lived through. We have seen Degas do this before—it is a welcome repetition of a familiar note, but it is not until we turn to the set of nude figures that we find the great artist revealing any

new phase of his talent. The first, in an attitude which suggests the kneeling Venus, washes her thighs in a tin bath. The second, a back view, full of the malformations of forty years, of children, of hard work, stands gripping her flanks with both hands. The naked woman has become impossible in modern art; it required Degas' genius to infuse new life into the worn-out theme. Cynicism was the great means of eloquence of the Middle Ages, and with cynicism Degas has rendered the nude again an artistic possibility. What Mr. Horsley or the British matron would say it is difficult to guess. Perhaps the hideousness depicted by M. Degas would frighten them more than the sensuality which they condemn in Sir Frederick Leighton. But, be this as it may, it is certain that the great fat, short-legged creature, who in her humble and touching ugliness passes a chemise over her lumpy shoulders, is a triumph of art. Ugliness is trivial, the monstrous is terrible; Velasquez knew this when he painted his dwarfs.

Pissarro exhibited a group of girls gathering apples in a garden—sad greys and violets harmonized. The figures seem to move as in a dream: we are on the thither side of life, in a world of quiet colour and happy aspiration. Those apples will never fall from the branches, those baskets that the stooping girls are filling will never be filled: that garden is the garden of the peace that life has not for giving, but which the painter has set in an eternal dream of violet and grey.

Madame Morizot exhibited a series of delicate fancies. Here are two young girls, the sweet atmosphere folds them as with a veil, they are all summer, their dreams are limitless, their days are fading, and their ideas follow the flight of the white butterflies through the standard roses. Take note, too, of the stand of fans: what delicious fancies are there—willows, balconies, gardens and terraces.

Then, contrasting with these distant tendernesses, there was the vigorous painting of Guillaumin. There life is rendered in violent and colourful brutality. The ladies fishing in the park, with the violet of the skies, and the

green of the trees descending upon them, is a *chef d'œuvre.* Nature seems to be closing about them like a tomb ; and that hillside—sunset flooding the skies with yellow and the earth with blue shadow—is another piece of painting that will one day find a place in one of the public galleries ; and the same can be said of the portrait of the woman on a background of chintz flowers.

We could but utter coarse gibes and exclaim, "What could have induced him to paint such things ? surely he must have seen that it was absurd. I wonder if the Impressionists are in earnest or if it is only *une blague qu'on nous fait ?*" Then we stood and screamed at Monet, that most exquisite painter of blond light. We stood before the "Turkeys," and fell to wondering seriously if "it were serious work,"—that *chef d'œuvre !* the high grass that the turkeys are gobbling is flooded with sunlight so swift and intense that for a moment the illusion is complete. "Just look at the house ! why, the turkeys couldn't walk in at the door. The perspective is all wrong." Then followed other remarks of an educational kind ; and when we came to those piercingly personal visions of railway-stations by the same painter—those rapid sensations of steel and vapour—our laughter knew no bounds. "I say, Marshall, just look at this wheel ; he dipped his brush into cadmium yellow and whisked it round, that's all." Nor had we any more understanding for Renoir's rich sensualities of tone ; nor did the mastery with which he achieves an absence of shadow appeal to us. You see colour and light in his pictures as you do in nature, and the child's criticism of a portrait—"Why is one side of the face black ?" is answered. There was a half-length nude figure of a girl. How the round fresh breasts palpitate in the light ! such a glorious glow of whiteness was attained never before. But we saw nothing except that the eyes were out of drawing.

For art was not for us then as it is now—a mere emotion, right or wrong only in proportion to its intensity : we believed then in the grammar of art, perspective, anatomy, and *la*

jambe qui porte ; and we found all this in Julien's studio.

A year passed ; a year of art and dissipation—one part art, two parts dissipation. We mounted and descended at pleasure the rounds of society's ladder. One evening we would spend at Constant's, Rue de la Gaieté, in the company of thieves and housebreakers ; on the following evening we were dining with a duchess or a princess in the Champs Elysées. We prided ourselves vastly on our versatility in using with equal facility the language of the "fence's" parlour, and that of the literary salon ; on being able to appear as much at home in one as in the other. Delighted at our prowess, we often whispered, "The princess, I swear, would not believe her eyes if she saw us now" ; and then in terrible slang we shouted a benediction on some "crib" that was going to be broken into that evening. We thought there was something very thrilling in leaving the Rue de la Gaieté, returning home to dress, and presenting our spotless selves to the *élite*, in being at home in all company, in being able to waltz perfectly in different styles, and to avoid making love to the wrong woman.

But the excitement of climbing up and down the social ladder did not stave off our craving for art : and about this time there came a very decisive event in our lives. Marshall's last and really *grande passion* had come to a violent termination and monetary difficulties forced him to turn his thoughts to painting on china as a means of livelihood. And as this young man always sought extremes, he went to Belleville, donned a blouse, ate garlic with his food, and settled down to live there as a workman. I had been to see him, and had found him building a wall. And with sorrow I related his state that evening to Julien in the Café Veron. He said, after a pause :

"Since you profess so much friendship for him, why do you not do him a service that cannot be forgotten since the result will always continue ? Why don't you save him from the life you describe ? If you are not actually rich you are at least in

easy circumstances, and can afford to give him a *pension* of three hundred francs a month. I will give him the use of my studio, which means, as you know, models and teaching; Marshall has plenty of talent, all he wants is a year's education: in a year or a year and a half, certainly at the end of two years, he will begin to make money."

It is rather a shock to one who is at all concerned with his own genius to be asked to act as foster-mother to another's. Then three hundred francs meant a great deal, plainly it meant deprivation of those superfluities which are so intensely necessary to the delicate and refined. Julien watched me. This large crafty Southerner knew what was passing in me; he knew I was realizing all the manifold inconveniences—the duty of looking after Marshall's wants for two years, and to make the pill easier he said:—

"If three hundred francs a month are too heavy for your purse, you might take an apartment and ask Marshall to come and live with you. You told me the other day you were tired of hotel life. It would be an advantage to you to live with him. You want to do something yourself; and the fact of his being obliged to attend the studio (for I should advise you to have a strict agreement with him regarding the work he is to do) would be an extra inducement to you to work hard."

I always decide at once, reflection does not help me, and a moment after I said, "Very well, Julien, I will."

And next day I went with the news to Belleville. Marshall protested he had no real talent. I protested he had, and amid our different protests an agreement was drawn up and signed. He was to work in the studio eight hours a day; he was to draw until such time as M. Lefebvre set him to paint; and in proof of his industry he was to bring me at the end of each week a study from life and a composition, the subject of which the master gave at the beginning of each week; in return I was to take an apartment near the studio, give him an abode, food, *blanchissage*. As if to convince himself of his earnestness, he began to manifest prodigious energy, telling

me three days after that he had found an apartment in Le Passage des Panoramas which would suit us perfectly. The news was not altogether pleasant, but the plunge had been taken. I paid my hotel bill, and sent my taciturn valet to happy evenings in the Sun Music Hall.

It was disagreeable to have a window opening not to the sky, but to an unclean prospect of glass roofing; and it was not agreeable to get up at seven in the morning; and ten hours of work daily are trying to the resolution even of the best intentioned. But we had sworn to forgo all pleasures for the sake of art—*table d'hôtes* in the Rue Maubeuge, French and foreign duchesses in the Champs Elysées, thieves in the Rue de la Gaieté.

I was entering on a duel with Marshall for supremacy in an art for which, as has already been said, I possessed few qualifications, certainly no facilities. It will be understood how a mind like mine, intensely alive to all impulses, and unsupported by any moral convictions, would suffer in a contest waged under such unequal and cruel conditions. It was in truth a year of great passion and great despair. Defeat is bitter when it comes swiftly and conclusively, but when defeat falls by inches like the pendulum in the pit, the agony is a little beyond verbal expression. I remember the first day of my martyrdom. The clocks were striking eight; we chose our places, got into position. After the first hour, I compared my drawing with Marshall's. He had, it is true, caught the movement of the figure better than I, but the character and the quality of his work was miserable. That of mine was not. I have said I possessed no artistic facility, but I did not say faculty; my drawing was never common; it was individual in feeling, it was refined. I possessed all the rarer qualities, but not that primary power without which all is valueless—I mean the talent of the boy who can knock off a clever caricature of his schoolmaster or make a *lifelike* sketch of his favourite horse on the barn-door with a piece of chalk.

The following week Marshall made a great deal of progress;

I thought the model did not suit me, and hoped for better luck next time. That time never came, and at the end of the first month I was left toiling hopelessly in the distance. Marshall's mind, though shallow, was bright, and he understood with strange ease all that was told him, and was able to put into immediate practice the methods of work inculcated by the professors. In fact, he showed himself singularly capable of education; little could be drawn out, but a great deal could be put in (using the word in its modern, not in its original sense). He showed himself intensely anxious to learn and to accept all that was said: the ideas and feelings of others ran into him like water into a bottle whose neck is suddenly stooped below the surface of the stream. He was an ideal pupil. It was Marshall here, it was Marshall there, and soon the studio was little but an agitation in praise of him and his work, and anxious speculation arose as to the medals he would obtain. I continued the struggle for nine months. I was in the studio at eight in the morning, I measured my drawing, I plumbed it throughout, I sketched in, having regard to *la jambe qui porte*, I modelled *par les masses*. During breakfast I considered how I should work during the afternoon, at night I lay awake thinking of what I might do to obtain a better result. But my efforts availed me nothing, it was like one who, falling, stretches his arms for help and grasps the yielding air. How terrible are the languors and yearnings of impotence! how wearing! And all this I suffered until the burden of unachieved desire grew intolerable.

I laid down my charcoal and said, "I will never draw or paint again." That vow I have kept.

Surrender brought relief, but my life seemed like a sea without a sail upon it, and as desolate. "To what shall I turn?" I asked myself, and my heart did not answer the question at once. I strove to read: but it was impossible to sit at home almost within earshot of the studio, and with all the memories of defeat still ringing their knells in my heart. Marshall's success clamoured loudly from without; every day,

almost every hour of the day, I heard of the medals which he would carry off, of what Lefebvre thought of his drawing this week, of Boulanger's opinion of his talent. I do not wish to excuse my conduct, but I cannot help saying that Marshall showed me neither consideration nor pity, he did not even seem to understand that I was suffering, that my nerves had been terribly shaken, and he flaunted his superiority relentlessly in my face—his good looks, his talents, his popularity I did not know then how little these studio successes really meant.

Vanity? no, it was not his vanity that maddened me; to me vanity is rarely displeasing, sometimes it is singularly attractive; but by a certain insistence and aggressiveness in the details of life he allowed me to feel that I was only a means for the moment, a serviceable thing enough, but one that would be very soon discarded and passed over. This was intolerable. I packed up my portmanteau and left, after having kept my promise for only ten months. By so doing I involved my friend in grave and cruel difficulties; by this action I imperilled his future prospects. It was a dastardly action, but his presence had grown unbearable; yes, unbearable in the fullest acceptation of the word, and in ridding myself of him I felt as if a world of misery were being lifted from me.

CHAP. V

After three months spent in a sweet seaside resort, where unoccupied men and ladies whose husbands are abroad happily congregate, I returned to Paris refreshed.

Marshall and I were no longer on speaking terms, but I saw him daily, in a new overcoat, of a cut admirably adapted to his figure, sweeping past the fans and the jet ornaments of the Passage des Panoramas. The coat interested me, and I remembered that if I had not broken with him I should have been able to ask him some essential questions concerning it.

Of such trifles as this the sincerest friendships are made ; he was as necessary to me as I to him, and after some demur on his part a reconciliation was effected.

Then I took an *appartement* in one of the old houses in Rue de la Tour des Dames, for windows there overlooked a bit of tangled garden with a dilapidated statue. It was Marshall, of course, who undertook the task of furnishing, and he lavished on the rooms the fancies of an imagination that suggested the collaboration of a courtesan of high degree and a fifth-rate artist. Nevertheless, our salon was a pretty resort—English cretonne of a very happy design—vine leaves, dark green and golden, broken up by many fluttering jays. The walls were stretched with this colourful cloth, and the armchairs and the couches were to match. The drawing-room was in cardinal red, hung from the middle of the ceiling and looped up to give the appearance of a tent ; a faun, in terra-cotta, laughed in the red gloom, and there were Turkish couches and lamps. In another room you faced an altar, a Buddhist temple, a statue of Apollo, and a bust of Shelley. The bedrooms were made unconventional with cushioned seats and rich canopies ; and in picturesque corners there were censers, great church candlesticks, and palms ; then think of the smell of burning incense and wax and you will have imagined the sentiment of our apartment in Rue de la Tour des Dames. I bought a Persian cat, and a python that made a monthly meal off guinea-pigs ; Marshall, who did not care for pets, filled his rooms with flowers—he used to sleep beneath a tree of gardenias in full bloom. We were so, Henry Marshall and George Moore, when we went to live in 76 Rue de la Tour des Dames, we hoped for the rest of our lives. He was to paint, I was to write.

Before leaving for the seaside I had bought some volumes of Hugo and Musset ; but in pleasant, sunny Boulogne poetry went flat, and it was not until I got into my new rooms that I began to read seriously. Books are like individuals ; you know at once if they are going to create a sense within the

sense, to fever, to madden you in blood and brain, or if they will merely leave you indifferent, or irritable, having unpleasantly disturbed sweet intimate musings as might a draught from an open window. Many are the reasons for love, but I confess I only love woman or book, when it is as a voice of conscience, never heard before, heard suddenly, a voice I am at once endearingly intimate with. This announces feminine depravities in my affections. I am feminine, morbid, perverse. But above all perverse; almost everything perverse interests, fascinates me. Wordsworth is the only simple-minded man I ever loved, if that great austere mind, chill even as the Cumberland year, can be called simple. But Hugo is not perverse, nor even personal. Reading him was like being in church with a strident-voiced preacher shouting from out of a terribly sonorous pulpit. "Les Orientales . . ." An East of painted cardboard, tin daggers, and a military band playing the Turkish patrol in the Palais Royal. . . . The verse is grand, noble, tremendous; I liked it, I admired it, but it did not—I repeat the phrase—awake a voice of conscience within me; and even the structure of the verse was too much in the style of public buildings to please me. Of "Les Feuilles d'Automne" and "Les Chants du Crépuscule" I remember nothing. Ten lines, fifty lines of "La Légende des Siècles," and I always think that it is the greatest poetry I have ever read, but after a few pages the book is laid down and forgotten. Having composed more verses than any man that ever lived, Hugo can only be taken in the smallest doses; if you repeat any passage to a friend across a *café* table, you are both appalled by the splendour of the imagery, by the thunder of the syllables.

> "Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été
> Avait en s'en allant négligemment jeté
> Cette faucille d'or dans les champs des étoiles."

But I never read through a volume without feeling that Hugo's genius is more German than French; and perhaps

that is why the poem is better than the volume, the stanza better than the poem, and the single line best of all :

" Le clair de lune bleu qui baigne l'horizon."

Without a " like " or an " as," by a mere statement of fact, the picture, nay more, the impression, is produced. The poem which this line concludes—" La fête chez Thérèse "—is an admirable picture of mediæval life, but we never really enjoy it except when the newspapers quote it. His humanitarianism is especially German, and of all his treatment of God ; arm in arm he romps Him round the universe—two immortalities, it is true, but of the twain Hugo prefers his own. His delight in little children is perhaps still more unbearable, for while telling their innocence, he watches them curiously ; and as soon as the song is over and the crowd disperses, he entices them down a by-way.

The first time I read of *une bouche d'ombre* I was astonished, nor did the second or third repetition produce a change in my mood of mind ; but sooner or later it was impossible to avoid conviction, that of the two " the rosy fingers of the dawn," although some three thousand years older, is younger, truer, and more beautiful. Homer's similes can never grow old ; *une bouche d'ombre* was old the first time it was said, and may be looked upon as the birthplace and the grave of Hugo's genius.

About this time I used to hear of Musset from Marshall and the Marquise, who were in the habit of reading him ; and in moments of relaxation, they marked their favourite passages, so he came to me highly recommended. But little progress was made in his poetry. His modernisms were out of tune with the spring of my aspirations, and instead of the unexpected word and the eccentricities of expression which were, and are still, so dear to me, I discovered only the clumsy versification of the man that nature designed for a prose-writer. An error of diction is pardonable if it does not err on the side of the commonplace ; but the commonplace, the natural, is constitutionally abhorrent ; and I have never been

able to read with any very unashamed sense of pleasure even the opening lines of "Rolla," a splendid lyrical outburst in a way. What I remember of it now are those two odious *chevilles—marchait et respirait*, and *Astarté fille de l'onde amère ;* nor does the fact that *amère* rhymes with *mère* condone the offence, although it proves that even Musset felt that perhaps the richness of the rhyme might render tolerable the intolerable. It is, however, to my credit that the Spanish love songs moved me not at all ; and it was not until I read that magnificently grotesque poem "La Ballade à la Lune," that I could be induced to bend the knee and acknowledge Musset a poet.

I still read and spoke of Shelley with a rapture of joy—he was still my "pinnace." But this craft, fashioned of mother-o'-pearl, with starlight at the helm and moonbeams for sails, suddenly ran on a reef and went down, not out of sight, but out of the agitation of actual life. The reef was Gautier ; I read "Mlle. de Maupin" at a moment when I was weary of spiritual passion, and this great exaltation of the visible above the invisible at once conquered and led me captive. This plain scorn of a world exemplified in lacerated saints and a crucified Redeemer opened up a prospect of new beliefs and new joys in things and new revolts against all that had come to form part and parcel of the commonalty of mankind. Shelley's teaching had been, while accepting the body, to dream of the soul as a star, and so preserve our ideal ; but now I saw suddenly, with delightful clearness and with intoxicating conviction, that by looking without shame and accepting with love the flesh, I might raise it to as high a place within as divine a light as even the soul had been set in. The ages were as an aureole, and I stood as if enchanted before the noble nakedness of the elder gods : not the middle nudity that sex has preserved in this modern world, but the clean pagan nude—a love of life and beauty, the broad fair breast of a boy, the long flanks, the head thrown back. I cried out with my master : the bold fearless gaze of Venus is lovelier than the lowered glance of the Virgin, and the blood that flowed upon

Mount Calvary "*ne m'a jamais baigné dans ses flots.*" A sublime vindication of one born into a world that was not his.

I will not turn to the book to find the exact words—for ten years I have not read the Word that has become so inexpressibly a part of me—but will refrain, as Mlle. de Maupin refrained, knowing well that the face of love may not be seen twice.

None more than I had cherished mystery and dream : my life until now had been but a mist which revealed, as each cloud wreathed and went out, the red of some strange flower or some tall peak, blue and snowy and fairylike in lonely moonlight ; and now so great was my conversion that the more brutal the outrage offered to my ancient ideal, the rarer and keener was my delight. I read almost without fear : " My dreams are of naked youths riding white horses through mountain passes ; there are no clouds in my dreams, or if there are any, they are cut with the chisel from blocks fallen from the statue of Jupiter."

I had shaken off all belief in Christianity early in life with Shelley's help. He had replaced faith by reason ; I still suffered, but need suffer no more. Here was a new creed proclaiming the divinity of the body ; and for a long time the reconstruction of all my theories of life on a purely pagan basis occupied my attention. The outlines of the castle showing through the romantic woods, and the lovers leaning over the horses' necks to each other's faces, enchanted me ; and equally the description of the performance of " As You Like It " ; in it Rodolph sees Mlle. de Maupin for the first time in woman's attire, and if she were dangerously beautiful as a man, that beauty is forgotten in the rapture and praise of her unmatchable woman's loveliness.

But if " Mlle. de Maupin " was the highest peak, it was not the entire mountain. The range was long, and each summit offered to the eye a new and delightful prospect. There were the numerous tales—tales as perfect as the world has ever seen ; " La Morte Amoureuse," " Jettatura," " Une Nuit de

Cléopâtre," etc., and then the very diamonds of the crown, "Les Emaux et Camées," "La Symphonie en Blanc Majeur," in which the adjective *blanc* and *blanche* is repeated with miraculous felicity in each stanza. And then Contralto—

> "Mais seulement il se transpose,
> Et, passant de la forme au son,
> Trouve dans sa métamorphose
> La jeune fille et le garçon."

Transpose—a word never before used except in musical application, and now for the first time applied to material form, and with a beauty-giving touch that Phidias might be proud of. It may be that I do not quote correctly; such is my best memory of the stanza, and here, that is more important than the stanza itself. That other, "The Châtelaine and the Page"; and that other, "The Doves"; and that other, "Romeo and Juliet," and the exquisite cadence of the line ending "*balcon*." Novelists have often shown how a love passion brings misery, despair, death and ruin upon a life, but I know of no story of the good or evil influence awakened by the chance reading of a book, the chain of consequences so far-reaching, so intensely dramatic. Never shall I open these books again, but were I to live for a thousand years, their power in my soul would remain unshaken. I am what they made me. Belief in humanity, pity for the poor, hatred of injustice, all that Shelley gave may never have been very deep or earnest; but I did love, I did believe. Gautier destroyed these illusions. He taught me that our boasted progress is but a pitfall into which the race is falling, and I learned that the correction of form is the highest ideal, and I accepted the plain, simple conscience of the pagan world as the perfect solution of the problem that had vexed me so long! I cried, "ave" to it all: lust, cruelty, slavery, and I would have held down my thumbs in the Colosseum that a hundred gladiators might die and wash me free of my Christian soul with their blood.

The study of Baudelaire hurried the course of the disease.* No longer is it the grand barbaric face of Gautier ; now it is the clean-shaven face of the mock priest, the slow, cold eyes and the sharp, cunning sneer of the cynical libertine who will be tempted that he may better know the worthlessness of temptation. "Les Fleurs du Mal ! " beautiful flowers, beautiful in sublime decay. What a great record is yours, and were Hell a reality how many souls would we find wreathed with your poisonous blossoms ! The village maiden goes to her Faust ; the children of the nineteenth century go to you, O Baudelaire, and having tasted of your deadly delight all hope of repentance is vain. Flowers, beautiful in your sublime decay, I press you to my lips ; these northern solitudes, far from the rank Parisian garden where I gathered you, are full of you, even as the seashell of the sea, and the sun that sets on this wild moorland evokes the magical verse :

" Un soir fait de rose et de bleu mystique
Nous échangerons un éclair unique
Comme un long sanglot tout chargé d'adieux."

For months I fed on the mad and morbid literature that the enthusiasm of 1830 called into existence. The gloomy and sterile little pictures of " Gaspard de la Nuit," or the elaborate criminality of " Les Contes Immoraux," laboriously invented lifeless things with creaky joints, pitiful lay figures that fall to dust as soon as the book is closed, and in the dust only the figures of the terrible ferryman and the unfortunate Dora remain. " Madame Potiphar " cost me forty francs, and I never read more than a few pages.

Like a pike after minnows I pursued the works of Les Jeune France along the quays and through every arcade in Paris. One man's solitary work (he died very young; but he is known to have excelled all in the length of his hair and the redness of his waistcoats) resisted my efforts to capture it. At

*Surely the phrase is ill-considered, hurried ; "my convalescence" would express the author's meaning better.

last I caught sight of the precious volume in a shop on the Quai Voltaire, and trembling, asked the price. The man fixed his eyes on me and answered :

" A hundred and fifty francs."

A great sum, no doubt, but I paid it and hurried home to read, hoping it would not prove as disappointing as many that had gone before : I had read many books without profit, but this one (of which I had heard so much) was empty. " Not a queer phrase, not an outrage of any sort or kind, not even a new blasphemy ; it means nothing to me," I said, " nothing but a hundred and fifty francs."

Having thus rudely, and very pikelike, knocked my nose against the bottom—this book was, most certainly, the bottom of the literature of 1830—I came up to the surface and began to look around my contemporaries for something to read.

I have remarked before on the instinctiveness of my likes and dislikes, on my susceptibility to the sound of and even to the appearance of a name upon paper. His name, Leconte de Lisle, repelled me from the first, and it was only by a very deliberate outrage to my feelings that I bought and read " Les Poèmes Antiques," and " Les Poèmes Barbares " ; I was deceived in nothing, all I had anticipated I found—antiquated nothingness. Leconte de Lisle produces on me the effect of a walk through the new Law Courts, with a steady but not violent draught sweeping from end to end. And when I saw him the last time I was in Paris, his head—a declaration of righteousness, a cross between a Cæsar by Jérôme, and an archbishop of a provincial town, set all my natural antipathy on edge instantly. Hugo is often pompous, shallow, empty, unreal, but he is at least an artist, and when he thinks of the artist and forgets the prophet, as in " Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois," his juggling with the verse is magnificent, superb. Hallo, listen to this :

"Comme un geai sur l'arbre
Le roi se tient fier ;
Son cœur est de marbre,
Son ventre est de chair.

"On a pour sa nuque
Et son front vermeil
Fait une perruque
Avec le soleil.

"Il règne, il végète
Effrayant zéro ;
Sur lui se projette
L'ombre du bourreau.

"Son trône est la tombe,
Et sur le pavé
Quelque chose en tombe
Qu'on n'a point lavé."

But how to get the first line of the last stanza into five syllables I cannot think. If ever I meet with the volume again I will look it out and see how that *rude dompteur de syllables* managed it. But stay, *son trône est la tombe* brings the line right, and the generalization would be in the "line" of Hugo. Hugo—how impossible it is to speak of French literature without referring to him! Let these, however, be concluding words, that he thought he could by saying everything, and, saying everything twenty times over, for ever render impossible the rehearsal of another great poet. And the net result of Hugo's ambition is that nobody reads him except when the journalists quote him in the newspapers, which is more reasonable than appears at first sight, for an essential condition of a work of art is that it should be rare ; another condition is that it should be brief. Of an entire poem, as has been said, it is seldom that we remember more than a stanza, and very often of the stanza only a single line remains in the memory :

" Le clair de lune bleu qui baigne l'horizon."

is all that I remember of " La fête chez Thérèse." Villiers always used to contend that no poem should be extended beyond a single line :

" O pasteur, Hespérus à l'occident s'allume."

The sweet, sad serenity of the evening air is contained in this verse. The star shines in the west, the lambs run to the ewes, and the shepherd leads the flock foldwards. Why add to the line ?

I remember Villiers one morning, not long before Venus kindles in the west, telling a group that followed him from *café* to *café* listening to his stories that he had composed a drama on the subject of the Cenci, and that according to his poetic principle, he had compressed the entire drama into one line. " Beatrice," he said, throwing back his hair, " is not content with merely murdering her father ; she has had him made into soup." The soup is served and is handed round to the guests at a great banquet given in honour of the assassination. It is at this point of the tragedy *que je place mon vers :*

" Et les yeux du bouillon étaient ceux de son père."

Sometimes Villiers would add a morality to his single-line poems. Here is an example :

" Pépin le bref est mort depuis onze cents ans."

Morality :

" Quand on est mort c'est pour longtemps."

But to return to Leconte de Lisle. See his " Discours de Réception." Is it possible to imagine anything more arid ? Rhetoric of this sort, " *des vers d'or sur une enclume d'airain,*" and such sententious platitudes as this (speaking of the realists), " *Les épidémies de cette nature passent, et le génie demeure.*"

Théodore de Banville seemed to me to freeze into icicles, a beautiful cold glitter. He had no new creed to proclaim nor old creed to denounce ; the inherent miseries of human life did not seem to touch him, nor did he sing the languors and ardours of animal or spiritual passion. And it was a long time before I began to understand that it is enough if the poet sings like the lark for love of the song. Banville sings of the white lily and the red rose ; such knowledge of, such observation of nature is enough for the poet, and he sings and he trills ; there is magic trilling in every song, and the song as it ascends rings, and all the air quivers with the ever-widening circle of the echoes, sighing and dying out of the ear until the last faintness is reached. Out of the sky the poet descends singing, and the glad rhymes clash and dash forth again. Banville is not the poet, he is the bard. The great questions that agitate the mind of man have not troubled him : life, death, and love he perceives only as pretexts. Only the song is real, and he is lyrical always ; even in conversation his wit flies out on clear-cut, swallow-like wings. In speaking to Paul Alexis of his book " Le Besoin d'Aimer," he said : " *Vous avez trouvé un titre assez laid pour faire reculer les divines étoiles.*"

It is now well known that French verse is not seventy years old. If it was Hugo who invented French rhyme, it was Banville who broke up the couplet. Hugo had perhaps ventured to place the pause between the adjective and its noun, but it was not until Banville wrote the line, " *Elle filait pensivement la blanche laine,*" that the cæsura received its final *coup de grâce.* This verse has been probably more imitated than any other verse in the French language. *Pensivement* was replaced by some similar four-syllable adverb, *Elle tirait nonchalamment les bas de soie, etc.*

I read the French poets of the modern school—Coppée, Mendès, Léon, Dierx, Verlaine, José Maria de Hérédia, Mallarmé, Richepin, Villiers de l'Isle Adam. Coppée, as may be imagined, I was only capable of appreciating in his first manner, when he wrote those exquisite but purely

artistic sonnets "La Tulipe," and "Le Lys." In the latter a room, decorated with daggers, armour, jewellery, and china, is beautifully described, and it is only in the last line that the lily, which animates and gives life to the whole, is introduced. *Noble et pur un grand lys se meurt dans une coupe.* But the exquisite poetic perceptivity Coppée showed in his modern poems, the certainty with which he raised the commonest subject, investing it with sufficient dignity for his purpose, escaped me wholly, and I could not but turn with horror from such poems as "La Nourrice" and "Le Petit Epicier." I could not understand how anybody could bring himself to acknowledge the vulgar details of our vulgar age. The fiery glory of José Maria de Hérédia, on the contrary, filled me with enthusiasm—ruins and sand, shadow and silhouette of palms and pillars, negroes, crimson swords, silence, and arabesques. Like great copper pans goes the clangour of the rhymes.

"Entre le ciel qui brûle et la mer qui moutonne,
Au somnolent soleil d'un midi monotone,
Tu songes, O guerrière, aux vieux conquistadors;

Et dans l'énervement des nuits chaudes et calmes,
Berçant ta gloire éteinte, O cité, tu t'endors
Sous les palmiers, au long frémissement des palmes."

Catulle Mendès, a perfect realization of his name, with his pale hair, and his fragile face illuminated with the idealism of a depraved woman. He takes you by the arm, by the hand, he leans towards you, his words are caresses, his fervour is delightful, and to hear him is as sweet as drinking a smooth perfumed yellow wine. All he says is false—the book he has just read, the play he is writing, the woman who loves him. . . . He buys a packet of bonbons in the streets and eats them, and it is false. An exquisite artist; physically and spiritually he is art; he is the muse herself, or rather, he is one of

the minions of the muse. Passing from flower to flower he goes, his whole nature pulsing with butterfly voluptuousness. He has written poems as good as Hugo, as good as Leconte de Lisle, as good as Banville, as good as Baudelaire, as good as Gautier, as good as Coppée ; he never wrote an ugly line in his life, but he never wrote a line that someone of his brilliant contemporaries might not have written. He has produced good work of all kinds " et voilà tout." Every generation, every country, has its Catulle Mendès. Robert Buchanan is ours, only in the adaptation Scotch gruel has been substituted for perfumed yellow wine. No more delightful talker than Mendès, no more accomplished *littérateur*, no more fluent and translucid critic. I remember the great moonlights of the Place Pigalle, when, on leaving the *café*, he would take me by the arm, and expound Hugo's or Zola's last book, thinking as he spoke of the Greek sophists. There were for contrast Mallarmé's Tuesday evenings, a few friends sitting round the hearth, the lamp on the table. I have met none whose conversation was more fruitful, but I never enjoyed his poetry, his early verses of course excepted. When I knew him he had published the celebrated " L'Après-Midi d'un Faune " : the first poem written in accordance with the theory of symbolism. But when it was given to me (this marvellous brochure furnished with strange illustrations and wonderful tassels), I thought it absurdly obscure. Since then, however, it has been rendered by force of contrast with the enigmas the author has since published a marvel of lucidity ; I am sure if I were to read it now I should appreciate its many beauties. It bears the same relation to the author's later work as " Rienzi " to " The Walkyrie." But what is symbolism ? Vulgarly speaking, saying the opposite to what you mean. For example, you want to say that music, which is the new art, is replacing the old art, which is poetry. First symbol : a house in which there is a funeral, the pall extends over the furniture. The house is poetry, poetry is dead. Second symbol : "*Notre vieux grimoire*," *grimoire* is the parchment,

parchment is used for writing, therefore *grimoire* is the symbol for literature, " *d'où s'exaltent les milliers*," thousands of what? of letters of course. We have heard a great deal in England of Browning obscurity. The " Red Cotton Nightcap Country" is a child at play compared to a sonnet by such a determined symbolist as Mallarmé, or better still his disciple Ghil who has added to the infirmities of symbolism those of poetic instrumentation. For according to M. Ghil and his organ *Les Ecrits pour l'Art* it would appear that the syllables of the French language evoke in us the sensations of different colours; consequently the timbre of the different instruments. The vowel *u* corresponds to the colour yellow, and therefore to the sound of flutes.

Arthur Rimbaud was, it is true, first in the field with these pleasant and genial theories; but M. Ghil informs us that Rimbaud was mistaken in many things, particularly in coupling the sound of the vowel *u* with the colour green instead of with the colour yellow. M. Ghil has corrected this very stupid blunder and many others; and his instrumentation in his last volume, " Le Geste Ingénu," may be considered as complete and definitive. The work is dedicated to Mallarmé, " Père et Seigneur des ors, des pierreries, et des poisons," and other works are to follow: the six tomes of " Légendes de Rêves et de Sang," the innumerable tomes of " La Glose," and the single tome of " La Loi."

And that man Gustave Kahn, who takes the French language as a violin and lets the bow of his emotion run at wild will upon it, producing strange acute strains, unpremeditated harmonies comparable to nothing that I know of but some Hungarian rhapsody; verses of seventeen syllables interwoven with verses of eight, and even nine masculine rhymes, seeking strange union with feminine rhymes in the middle of the line—a music sweet, subtil, and epicene; the half-note, the inflection, but not the full tone—as " *se fondre, ô souvenir, des lys âcres délices*."

Se penchant vers les dahlias,
Des paons cabrent des rosaces lunaires
L'assoupissement des branches vénère
Son pâle visage aux mourants dahlias.

Elle écoute au loin les brèves musiques
Nuit claire aux ramures d'accords,
Et la lassitude a bercé son corps
Au rythme odorant des pures musiques.

Les paons ont dressé la rampe occellée
Pour la descente de ses yeux vers le tapis
  De choses et de sens
Qui va vers l'horizon, parure vermiculée
  De son corps alangui
  En l'âme se tapit
Le flou désir molli de récits et d'encens.

I laughed at these verbal eccentricities, but they were not without their effect, and that a demoralizing one ; for in me they aggravated the fever of the unknown, and whetted my appetite for the strange, abnormal and unhealthy in art. Hence all pallidities of thought and desire were eagerly welcomed ; Verlaine became my poet, and the terraces and colonnades of "Les Fêtes Galantes" the chapel of my meditations, and my desire the lady who descends her castle stairs unmindful that her page, a little nigger, is lifting her train higher than is necessary, sharing thereby with her monkey a view of her thighs. "Les Fêtes Galantes" is lit with dresses, white, blue, yellow, green, mauve, and undecided purple ; the voices ? strange contraltos ; the forms ? not those of men or women, but mystic, hybrid creatures, with hands nervous and pale, and eyes charged with eager and fitful light . . . "*un soir équivoque d'automne,*" . . . "*les belles pendent rêveuses à nos bras*" . . . and they whisper "*les mots spécieux et tout bas.*"

Gautier sang to his antique lyre praise of the flesh and

contempt of the soul; Baudelaire on a mediæval organ chanted his unbelief in goodness and truth and his hatred of life. But Verlaine advances one step further: hate is to him as commonplace as love, unfaith as vulgar as faith. The world is merely a doll to be attired to-day in eighteenth-century hoops, to-morrow in aureoles and stars. The Virgin is a pretty thing, worth a poem, but it would be quite too silly to talk about belief or unbelief; Christ in wood or plaster we have heard too much of, but Christ in painted glass amid crosiers and Latin terminations, is an amusing subject for poetry. And strangely enough, a withdrawing from all commerce with virtue and vice is, it would seem, a licentiousness more curiously subtle and penetrating than any other; and the licentiousness of the verse is equal to that of the emotion; every natural instinct of the language is violated, and the simple music native in French metre is replaced by falsetto notes sharp and intense. The charm is that of an odour of iris exhaled by some ideal tissues, or of a missal in a gold case, a precious relic of the pomp and ritual of an archbishop of Persepolis.

> Parsifal a vaincu les filles, leur gentil
> Babil et la luxure amusante et sa pente
> Vers la chair de garçon vierge que cela tente
> D'aimer des seins légers et ce gentil babil.
>
> Il a vaincu la femme belle au cœur subtil
> Etalant ses bras frais et sa gorge excitante;
> Il a vaincu l'enfer, il rentre sous la tente
> Avec un lourd trophée à son bras puéril.
>
> Il a guéri le roi, le voici roi lui-même.
> Avec la lance qui perça le flanc suprême
> Et prêtre du très-saint trésor essentiel;
>
> En robe d'or il adore, gloire et symbole,
> Le vase pur où resplendit le sang réel,
> Et, ô ces voix d'enfants chantant dans la coupole.

No English sonnet lingers in the ear like this one, and its beauty is as inexhaustible as a Greek marble. The hiatus in the last line was at first a little trying, but I have learnt to love it. Not in Baudelaire nor even in Poe is there more beautiful poetry to be found. Poe, unread and ill understood in America and England, here, thou art an integral part of our artistic life.

The Island o' Fay, Silence, Eleonore, were the familiar spirits of an apartment beautiful with Manets and tapestry; Swinburne and Rossetti were the English poets I read there; and I, a unit in the generation they have enslaved, clanked fetters and trailed a golden chain, in a set of stories in many various metres, to be called "Roses of Midnight." One of the characteristics of the volume was banishment of daylight: from its pages terraces, gardens and orchards were held forbidden; and my fantastics lived out their loves in the lamplight of yellow boudoirs, and died with the dawn which was supposed to be an awakening to consciousness of reality.

CHAP. VI

A LAST hour of vivid blue and gold glare; but now the twilight sheds softly upon the darting jays, and only the little oval frames catch the fleeting beams. I go to the miniatures. Amid the parliamentary faces, all strictly garrotted with many-folded handkerchiefs, there is a metal frame enchased with rubies and a few emeralds. And this *chef d'œuvre* of antique workmanship surrounds a sharp, shrewish, modern face, withal pretty.

She is a woman of thirty—no—she is the woman of thirty. Balzac has written some admirable pages on this subject; my memory of them is vague and uncertain, although durable, as all memories of him must be. But that marvellous story, or rather study, has been blunted in my knowledge of this tiny face with the fine masses of hair drawn up from the neck and

arranged elaborately on the crown. There is no fear of plagiary ; he cannot have said all ; he cannot have said what I want to say.

Looking at this face so mundane, so intellectually mundane, I see why a young man of refined mind—a bachelor who spends at least a pound a day on his pleasures, and in whose library are found some few volumes of modern poetry—seeks his ideal in a woman of thirty.

It is clear that, by the very essence of her being, the young girl may evoke no ideal but that of home ; and home is in his eyes the antithesis of freedom, desire, aspiration. He longs for mystery, deep and endless, and he is tempted with a foolish little illusion—white dresses, water-colour drawings and popular music. He dreams of Pleasure, and he is offered Duty ; for do not think that that sylph-like waist does not suggest to him a yard of apron string, cries of children, and that moist odious word " Papa." A young man of refined mind can look through the glass of the years.

He has sat in the stalls, opera-glass in hand ; he has met women of thirty at balls, and has sat with them beneath shadowy curtains ; he knows that the world is full of beautiful women, all waiting to be loved and amused, the circles of his immediate years are filled with feminine faces, they cluster like flowers on this side and that, and they fade into garden-like spaces of colour. How many may love him ? The loveliest may one day smile upon his knee ! and shall he renounce all for that little creature who has just finished singing and is handing round cups of tea ? Every bachelor contemplating marriage says, " I shall have to give up all for one, one."

The young girl is often pretty, but her prettiness is vague and uncertain, it inspires a sort of pitying admiration, but it suggests nothing ; the very essence of the young girl's being is that she should have nothing to suggest, therefore the beauty of the young face fails to touch the imagination. No past lies hidden in those translucent eyes, no story of hate,

disappointment, or sin. Nor is there in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases in a thousand any doubt that the hand, that spends at least a pound a day in restaurants and cabs, will succeed in gathering the muslin flower if he so wills it, and by doing so he will delight everyone. Where, then, is the struggle? where, then, is the triumph? Therefore, I say that if a young man's heart is not set on children, and tiresome dinner-parties, the young girl presents to him no possible ideal. But the woman of thirty presents from the outset all that is necessary to ensnare the heart of a young man. I see her sitting in her beautiful drawing-room, all designed by, and all belonging to her. Her chair is placed beneath an evergreen plant, and the long leaves lean out as if to touch her neck. The great white and red roses of the Aubusson carpet are spread enigmatically about her feline feet; a grand piano leans its melodious mouth to her; and there she sits when her visitors have left her, playing Beethoven's sonatas in the dreamy firelight. The spring-tide shows but a bloom of unvarying freshness; August has languished and loved in the strength of the sun. She is stately, she is tall. What sins, what disappointments, what aspirations lie in those grey eyes, mysteriously still, and mysteriously revealed? These a young man longs to know of, they are his life. He imagines himself sitting by her, when the others have gone, holding her hand, calling on her name; sometimes she moves away and plays the Moonlight Sonata. Letting her hands droop upon the keys she talks sadly, maybe affectionately! she speaks of the tedium of life, of its disenchantments. He knows well what she means, he has suffered as she has; but could he tell her, could she understand, that in his love reality would dissolve into a dream, all limitations would open into boundless infinity.

The husband he rarely sees. Sometimes a latch-key is heard about half past six. The man is thick, strong, common, his jaws are heavy, his eyes are expressionless, there is about him the loud swagger of the *caserne*, and he suggests the

inevitable question, Why did she marry him?—a question that every young man of refined mind asks a thousand times by day and ten thousand times by night, asks till he is five-and-thirty, and sees that his generation has passed into middle age.

Why did she marry him? Not the sea, nor the sky, nor the great mysterious midnight, when he opens his casement and gazes into starry space will give him answer; no Œdipus will ever come to unravel this riddle; this sphinx will never throw herself from the rock into the clangour of the sea-gulls and waves; she will never divulge her secret; and if she is the woman and not a woman of thirty, she has forgotten.

The young man shakes hands with the husband; he strives not to look embarrassed, and he talks of indifferent things—of how well he (the husband) is looking, of his amusements, his projects; and then he (the young man of refined mind) tastes of that keen and highly seasoned delight—happiness in crime. He knows not the details of her home life, the husband is merely a dark cloud that fills one side of the picture, sometimes obliterating the sunlight; a shadowy shape that in certain moments solidifies and assumes the likeness of a rock-sculptured, imminent monster, but the shadow and the shape and the threat are magnetic, and in a sense of danger the fascination is sealed.

The young man of refined mind is in a ballroom! He leans against the woodwork in a distant doorway; hardly knowing what to do with himself, he strives to interest himself in the conversation of a group of men twice his age. I will not say he is shunned; but neither the matrons nor the young girls make any advances towards him. The young girls so sweet—in the oneness of their fresh hair, flowers, dresses, and glances—are being introduced, are getting up to dance, and the hostess is looking round for partners. She sees the young man in the doorway, but she hesitates and goes to someone else, and if you asked her why, she could not tell you why she avoided him. Presently the woman of thirty enters. She

is in white satin and diamonds. She looks for him—a circular glance. Calm with possession she passes to a seat extending her hand here and there. She dances the eighth, twelfth and fifteenth waltz with him.

Will he induce her to visit his rooms? Will they be like Marshall's—strange debauches of colour and Turkish lamps—or mine, an old cabinet, a faded pastel which embalms the memory of a pastoral century, my taste; or will it be a library—two leather library chairs, a large escritoire, and a bust of Homer? Be this as it may, whether the apartments be the ruthless extravagance of artistic impulse, or the subdued taste of the student, she, the woman of thirty, shall be there by night and day: her altar is there, and even when she is sleeping safe in her husband's arms, with fevered brow, he, the young man of refined mind, alone and lonely shall kneel and adore her.

And should she *not* visit his rooms? If the complex and various accidents of existence should have ruled out her life virtuously; if the many inflections of sentiment have decided against this last consummation, then she will wax to the complete, the unfathomable temptress—the Lilith of old—she will never set him free, and in the end will be found about his heart "one strangling golden hair." She shall haunt his wife's face and words (should he seek to rid himself of her by marriage), a bitter sweet, a half-welcome enchantment; she shall consume and destroy the strength and spirit of his life, leaving it desolation, a barren landscape, burnt and faintly scented with the sea. Fame and wealth shall slip like sand from him. She may be set aside for the cadence of a rhyme, for the flowing line of a limb, but when the passion of art has raged itself out, she shall return to blight the peace of the worker.

A terrible malady is she, a malady the ancients knew of and called nympholepsy—a beautiful name evocative and symbolic of its ideal aspect, "the breast of the nymph in the brake." And the disease is not extinct in these modern days,

nor will it ever be so long as men shall yearn for the unattainable; and the prosy bachelors who trail their ill-fated lives from their chambers to their clubs know their malady, and they call it—the woman of thirty.

CHAP. VII

A Japanese dressing-gown, the ideality of whose tissue delights me, some fresh honey and milk set by this couch hung with royal fringes; and having partaken of this odorous refreshment, I call to Jack, my great python crawling about after a two months' fast. I tie up a guinea-pig to the *tabouret*, pure Louis XV, the little beast struggles and squeaks, the snake, his black, bead-like eyes are fixed, how superb are the oscillations . . . now he strikes: and with what exquisite gourmandise he lubricates and swallows!

Marshall is at the organ in the hall, he is playing a Gregorian chant, that beautiful hymn, the "Vexilla Regis," by Saint Fortunatus, the great poet of the Middle Ages. And, having turned over the leaves of "Les Fêtes Galantes," I sit down to write.

My original intention was to write some thirty or forty stories varying from thirty to three hundred lines in length. The nature of these stories is easy to imagine: there was the youth who wandered by night into a witches' sabbath, and was disputed for by the witches, young and old. There was the light o' love who went into the desert to tempt the holy man; but he died as he yielded, his arms stiffening by some miracle about her, and she, unable to free herself, died while her bondage was loosening in decay. My difficulties were increased by adopting as part of my task the introduction of all sorts of elaborate, and in many cases extravagantly composed metres, and I began to feel that I was working in sand; the house I was raising crumbled and fell away on every side. My stories had one merit; they were all, as far as I can

remember, perfectly constructed. The art of telling a story clearly and dramatically, *selon les procédés de M. Scribe*, had been learnt from M. Duval, the author of a hundred and sixy plays, written in collaboration with more than a hundred of the best writers of his day, including the master himself, Gautier. We used to meet at breakfast at a neighbouring *café*, and our conversation turned on *l'exposition de la pièce, préparer la situation, nous aurons des larmes, etc.* One day, as I sat waiting for him, I took up the *Voltaire*. It contained an article by M. Zola. *Naturalisme, la vérité, la science*, were repeated some half a dozen times. Hardly able to believe my eyes, I read that one should write with as little imagination as possible, that plot in a novel or in a play was illiterate and puerile, and that the art of M. Scribe was an art of strings and wires, etc. I rose up from breakfast, ordered my coffee, and stirred the sugar, a little dizzy, like one who has received a violent blow on the head.

Echo-augury! Words heard in an unexpected quarter, but applying marvellously well to the besetting difficulty of the moment. The reader who has followed me so far will remember the instant effect the word "Shelley" had upon me in childhood, and how it called into existence a train of feeling that illuminated the vicissitudes and passions of many years, until it was finally assimilated and became part of my being; the reader will also remember how the mere mention, at a certain moment, of the word "France" awoke a vital impulse, even a sense of final ordination, and how the irrevocable message was obeyed, and how it led to the creation of a mental existence.

And now for a third time I experienced the pain and joy of a sudden and inward light. Naturalism, truth, the new art, above all the phrase, "The new art," impressed me as with a sudden sense of light. I was dazzled, and I vaguely understood that my "Roses of Midnight" were sterile eccentricities, dead flowers that could not be galvanized into any semblance of life, passionless in all their passion.

I had read a few chapters of the "Assommoir," as it appeared in *La République des Lettres ;* I had cried, "ridiculous, abominable," only because it is characteristic of me to form an opinion instantly and assume at once a violent attitude. But now I bought up the back numbers of the *Voltaire*, and I looked forward to the weekly exposition of the new faith with febrile eagerness. The great zeal with which the new master continued his propaganda, and the marvellous way in which subjects the most diverse, passing events, political, social, religious, were caught up and turned into arguments for, or proof of the truth of naturalism astonished me wholly. The idea of a new art based upon science, in opposition to the art of the old world that was based on imagination, an art that should explain all things and embrace modern life in its entirety, in its endless ramifications, be, as it were, a new creed in a new civilization, filled me with wonder, and I stood dumb before the vastness of the conception, and the towering height of the ambition. In my fevered fancy I saw a new race of writers that would arise, and with the aid of the novel would continue to a more glorious and legitimate conclusion the work that the prophets had begun ; and at each development of the theory of the new art and its universal applicability, my wonder increased and my admiration choked me. If anyone should be tempted to turn to the books themselves to seek an explanation of this wild ecstasy, he would find nothing—as well drink the dregs of yesterday's champagne. One is lying before me now, and as I glance through the pages listlessly I say, "Only the simple crude statements of a man of powerful mind, but singularly narrow vision."

Still, although eager and anxious for the fray, I did not see how I was to participate in it. I was not a novelist, not yet a dramatic author, and the possibility of a naturalistic poet seemed to me not a little doubtful. I had clearly understood that the lyrical quality was to be for ever banished ; there were to be no harps and lutes in our heaven, only drums ;

and the preservation of all the essentials of poetry, by the simple enumeration of the utensils to be found in a back kitchen, sounded, I could not help thinking (here it becomes necessary to whisper), not unlike rigmarole. I waited for the master to speak. He had declared that the Republic would fall if it did not become instantly naturalistic ; he would not, he could not pass over in silence so important a branch of literature as poetry, no matter how contemptible he might think it. If he could find nothing to praise, he must at least condemn. At last the expected article came. It was all that could be desired by one in my fever of mind. Hugo's claims had been previously disproven, but now Banville and Gautier were declared to be warmed-up dishes of the ancient world ; Baudelaire was a naturalist, but he had been spoilt by the romantic influence of his generation. *Cependant* there were indications of the naturalistic movement even in poetry. I trembled with excitement, I could not read fast enough. Coppée had striven to simplify language, he had versified the street cries, *Achetez la France*, *le Soir*, *le Rappel*, he had sought to give utterance to humble sentiments as in " Le Petit Epicier de Montrouge," the little grocer *qui cassait le sucre avec mélancolie ;* Richepin had boldly and frankly adopted the language of the people in all its superb crudity. All this was, however, preparatory and tentative. We are waiting for our poet, he who will sing to us fearlessly of the rude industry of dustmen and the comestible glories of the market-places. The subjects are to hand, the formula alone is wanting.

The prospect dazzled me ; I tried to calm myself. Had I the stuff in me to win and to wear these bays, this stupendous laurel crown ?—bays, laurel crown, a distinct souvenir of Parnassus, but there is no modern equivalent, I must strive to invent a new one, in the meantime let me think. True it is that Swinburne was before me with the " Romantiques." The " Hymn of Proserpine " and " Dolores " are wonderful lyrical versions of " Mlle. de Maupin." In form " The Leper "

is old English, the colouring is Baudelaire, but the rude industry of the dustmen and the comestible glories of the market-place shall be mine. *A bas "Les Roses de Minuit!"*

But I felt the "naturalization" of the "Roses of Midnight" would prove a difficult task, and soon found it an impossible one; the poems were laid aside and a volume begun steeped in the delights of Bougival and Ville d'Avray. And this book was to be entitled "Poems of Flesh and Blood"!

"*Elle mit son plus beau chapeau, son chapeau bleu*" . . . and then? Why, then picking up her skirt, she threads her way through the crowded streets, reads the advertisements on the walls, hails the omnibus, inquires at the concierge's loge, murmurs as she goes upstairs, "*Que c'est haut le cinquième,*" and then? Why, the door opens, and she cries, "*Je t'aime.*"

But it was the idea of the new æstheticism—the new art corresponding to modern, as ancient art corresponded to ancient life—that captivated me, that led me away, and not a substantial knowledge of the work done by the naturalists. I had read the "Assommoir," and had been much impressed by its pyramid size, strength, height, and decorative grandeur, and also by the immense harmonic development of the idea; and the fugal treatment of the different scenes had seemed to me astonishingly new—the washhouse, for example: the fight motive is indicated, then follows the development of side issues, then comes the fight motive explained; it is broken off short, it flutters through a web of progressive detail, the fight motive is again taken up, and now it is worked out in all its fullness; it is worked up to *crescendo*, another side issue is introduced, and again the theme is given forth. And I marvelled greatly at the lordly, river-like roll of the narrative, sometimes widening out into lakes and shallowing meres, but never stagnating in fen or marshlands. The language, too, which I did not then recognize as the weak point, being little more than a boiling down of Chateaubriand and Flaubert, spiced with Goncourt, delighted me with its novelty, its

richness, its force. Nor did I then even roughly suspect that the very qualities which set my admiration in a blaze wilder than wildfire, being precisely those that had won the victory for the romantic school forty years before, were very antagonistic to those claimed for the new art. I was deceived, as was all my generation, by a certain externality, an outer skin, a nearness, *un approchement;* in a word, by a substitution of Paris for the distant and exotic backgrounds so beloved of the romantic school. I did not know then, as I do now, that art is external, that it is only the artist that changes, and that the two great divisions—the only possible divisions—are: those who have talent, and those who have no talent. But I do not regret my errors, my follies; it is not well to know at once of the limitations of life and things. I should be less than nothing had it not been for my enthusiasms; they were the saving clause in my life.

But although I am apt to love too dearly the art of my day, and to the disparagement of that of other days, I did not fall into the stupid mistake of placing the realistic writers of 1877 side by side with and on the same plane of intellectual vision as the great Balzac; I felt that that vast immemorial mind rose above them all, like a mountain above the highest tower.

And, strange to say, it was Gautier that introduced me to Balzac; for mention is made in the wonderful preface to "*Les Fleurs du Mal*" of Seraphita: Seraphita, Seraphitus; which is it?—woman or man? Should Wilfred or Mona be the possessor? A new Mlle. de Maupin, with royal lily and aureole, cloud-capped mountains, great gulfs of sea-water flowing up and reflecting as in a mirror the steep cliffs' side; the straight white feet are set thereon, the obscuring weft of flesh is torn, and the pure, strange soul continues its mystical exhortations. Then the radiant vision, a white glory, the last outburst and manifestation, the trumpets of the apocalypse, the colour of heaven, the closing of this stupendous allegory—Seraphita lying dead in the rays of the first sun of the nineteenth century.

I, therefore, had begun, as it were, to read Balzac backwards; instead of beginning with the plain, simple, earthly tragedy of the Père Goriot, I first knelt in a beautiful but distant coign of the great world of his genius—Seraphita. Certain nuances of soul are characteristic of certain latitudes, and what subtle instinct led him to Norway in quest of this fervent soul? The instincts of genius are unfathomable, but he who has known the white northern women with their pure spiritual eyes, will aver that instinct led him aright. I have known one, one whom I used to call Seraphita; Coppée knew her too, and that exquisite volume, "L'Exilé," so Seraphita-like in the keen blond passion of its verse, was written to her, and each poem was sent to her as it was written. Where is she now, that flower of northern snow, once seen for a season in Paris? Has she returned to her native northern solitudes, great gulfs of sea-water, mountain rock, and pine?

Balzac's genius is in his titles as heaven is in its stars: "Melmoth Réconcilié," "Jésus-Christ en Flandres," "Le Revers d'un Grand Homme," "La Cousine Bette." I read somewhere not very long ago, that Balzac was the greatest thinker that had appeared in France since Pascal. Of Pascal's claim to be a great thinker I confess I cannot judge. No man is greater than the age he lives in, and, therefore, to talk to us, the legitimate children of the nineteenth century, of proofs that we ought to believe in the Catholic God strikes us in just the same light as a proof that we ought to believe in Jupiter Ammon. "Les Pensées" could appear to me only as childish; the form is no doubt superb, but tiresome and sterile to one of such modern and exotic taste as myself. Still, I accept thankfully, in its sense of two hundred years, the compliment paid to Balzac; but I would add that he seems to me to have shown greater wings of mind than any writer that ever lived. I am aware that this last statement will make many cry "fool" and hiss "Shakespeare!" But I am not putting forward these criticisms axiomatically, but only as the expressions of an individual taste, and interesting so

far as they reveal to the reader the different developments and the progress of my mind. It might prove a little tiresome, but it would no doubt " look well," in the sense that going to church " looks well," if I were to write in here ten pages of praise of our national bard. I must, however, resist the temptation to " look well "; a confession is interesting in proportion to the amount of truth it contains, and I will, therefore, state that I never derived any profit whatsoever, and very little pleasure from the reading of the great plays. The beauty of the verse ! Yes ; he who loved Shelley as well as I could not fail to hear the melody of—

" Music to hear, why hearest thou music sadly ?
Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy."

Is not such music as this enough ? Of course, but I am a sensualist in literature. I may see perfectly well that this or that book is a work of genius, but if it doesn't " fetch me," it doesn't concern me, and I forget its very existence. What leaves me cold to-day will madden me to-morrow. With me literature is a question of sense, intellectual sense if you will, but sense all the same, and ruled by the same caprices—those of the flesh ? Now we enter on very subtle distinctions. No doubt that there is the brain-judgment and the sense-judgment of a work of art. And it will be noticed that these two forces of discrimination exist sometimes almost independently of each other, in rare and radiant instances confounded and blended in one immense and unique love. Who has not been, unless perhaps some dusty old pedant, thrilled and driven to pleasure by the action of a book that penetrates to and speaks to you of your most present and most intimate emotions ? This is of course pure sensualism ; but to take a less marked stage. Why should Marlowe enchant me ? why should he delight and awake enthusiasm in me, while Shakespeare leaves me cold ? The mind that can understand one can understand the other, but there are affinities in literature corresponding to, and very analogous to, sexual

affinities—the same unreasoned attractions, the same pleasures, the same lassitudes. Those we have loved most we are most indifferent to. Shelley, Gautier, Zola, Flaubert, Goncourt! how I have loved you all; and now I could not, would not, read you again. How womanly, how capricious; but even a light o' love is constant, if not faithful, to her *amant de cœur*. So with me; of those I have loved deeply there is but one that still may thrill me with the old passion, with the first ecstasy—it is Balzac. Upon that rock I built my church, and his great and valid talent saved me often from destruction, saved me from the shoaling waters of new æstheticisms, the putrid mud of naturalism, and the faint and sickly surf of the symbolists. Thinking of him, I could not forget that it is the spirit and not the flesh that is eternal; that, as it was thought that in the first instance gave man speech, so to the end it shall still be thought that shall make speech beautiful and rememberable. The grandeur and sublimity of Balzac's thoughts seem to me to rise to the loftiest heights, and his range is limitless; there is no passion he has not touched, and what is more marvellous, he has given to each in art a place equivalent to the place it occupies in nature; his intense and penetrating sympathy for human life and all that concerns it enabled him to surround the humblest subjects with awe and crown them with the light of tragedy. There are some, particularly those who can understand neither and can read but one, who will object to my comparison being drawn between the Dramatist and the Novelist; but I confess that I—if the inherent superiority of verse over prose, which I admit unhesitatingly, be waived—that I fail, utterly fail, to see in what Shakespeare is greater than Balzac. The range of the poet's thought is of necessity not so wide, and his concessions must needs be greater than the novelist's. On these points we will cry quits, and come at once to the vital question—the creation. Is Lucien inferior to Hamlet? Is Eugénie Grandet inferior to Desdemona? Is her father inferior to Shylock? Is Vautrin inferior to Macbeth? Can

it be said that the apothecary in the " Cousine Bette," or the Baron Hulot, or the Cousine Bette herself is inferior to anything the brain of man has ever conceived ? And it must not be forgotten that Shakespeare has had three hundred years and the advantage of stage representation to impress his characters on the sluggish mind of the world ; and as mental impressions are governed by the same laws of gravitation as atoms, our realization of Falstaff must of necessity be more vivid than of any character in contemporary literature, although it were equally great. And so far as epigram and aphorism are concerned, and here I speak with absolute sincerity and conviction, the work of the novelist seems to me richer than that of the dramatist. Who shall forget those terrible words of the poor life-weary orphan in the boarding-house ? Speaking of Vautrin she says, " His look frightens me as if he put his hand on my dress " ; and another epigram from the same book, " Woman's virtue is man's greatest invention." Find me anything in La Rochefoucauld that goes more incisively to the truth of things. One more ; here I can give the exact words : " *La gloire est le soleil des morts.*" It would be easy to compile a book of sayings from Balzac that would make all " Maximes " and " Pensées," even those of La Rochefoucauld or Joubert, seem trivial and shallow.

Balzac was the great moral influence of my life, and my reading culminated in the " Comédie Humaine." I no doubt fluttered through some scores of other books, of prose and verse, sipping a little honey, but he alone left any important or lasting impression upon my mind. The rest was like walnuts and wine, an agreeable after taste.

But notwithstanding all this reading I can lay no claim to scholarship of any kind ; for save life I could never learn anything correctly. I am a student only of ballrooms, barrooms, streets, and alcoves. I have read very little ; but all I read I can turn to account, and all I read I remember. To read freely, extensively, has always been my ambition, and my utter inability to study has always been to me a subject

of grave inquietude—study as contrasted with a general and haphazard gathering of ideas taken in flight. But in me the impulse is so original to frequent the haunts of men that it is irresistible, conversation is the breath of my nostrils, I watch the movement of life, and my ideas spring from it uncalled for, as buds from branches. Contact with the world is in me the generating force ; without this what invention I have is thin and sterile, and it grows thinner rapidly, until it does away utterly, as it did in the composition of my unfortunate "Roses of Midnight."

Men and women, oh, the strength of the living faces! conversation, oh, the magic of it! It is a fabulous river of gold where the precious metal is washed up without stint for all to take, to take as much as we can carry. Two old ladies discussing the peerage? Much may be learned, it is gold; poets and wits, then it is fountains whose spray solidifies into jewels, and every herb and plant is begemmed with the sparkle of the diamond and the glow of the ruby.

I did not go to either Oxford or Cambridge, but I went to the Nouvelle Athènes. What is the Nouvelle Athènes? He who would know anything of my life must know something of the academy of the fine arts. Not the official stupidity you read of in the daily papers, but the real French academy, the *café*. The Nouvelle Athènes is a *café* on the Place Pigalle. Ah! the morning idleness and the long evenings when life was but a summer illusion, the grey moonlights on the Place where we used to stand on the pavements, the shutters clanging up behind us, loath to separate, thinking of what we had left unsaid, and how much better we might have enforced our arguments. Dead and scattered are all those who used to assemble there, and those years and our home, for it was our home, live only in a few pictures and a few pages of prose. The same old story, the vanquished only are victorious; and though unacknowledged, though unknown, the influence of the Nouvelle Athènes is inveterate in the artistic thought of the nineteenth century.

How magnetic, intense, and vivid are these memories of youth! With what strange, almost unnatural clearness do I see and hear—see the white face of that *café*, the white nose of that block of houses, stretching up to the Place, between two streets. I can see down the incline of those two streets, and I know what shops are there; I can hear the glass door of the *café* grate on the sand as I open it. I can recall the smell of every hour. In the morning that of eggs frizzling in butter, the pungent cigarette, coffee and bad cognac; at five o'clock the fragrant odour of absinthe; and soon after the steaming soup ascends from the kitchen; and as the evening advances, the mingled smells of cigarettes, coffee, and weak beer. A partition, rising a few feet or more over the hats, separates the glass front from the main body of the *café*. The usual marble tables are there, and it is there we sat and æstheticized till two o'clock in the morning. But who is that man? he whose prominent eyes flash with excitement. That is Villiers de l'Isle Adam. The last or the supposed last of the great family. He is telling the girl a story—that fair girl with heavy eyelids, stupid and sensual. She is, however, genuinely astonished and interested, and he is striving to play upon her ignorance. Listen to him. "Spain—the night is fragrant with the sea and the perfume of the orange trees, you know—a midnight of stars and dreams. Now and then the silence is broken by the sentries challenging—that is all. But not in Spanish, but in French are the challenges given; the town is in the hands of the French; it is under martial law. But now an officer passes down a certain garden, a Spaniard disguised as a French officer; from the balcony the family—one of the most noble and oldest families Spain can boast of, a thousand years, long before the conquest of the Moors—watches him. Well then"—Villiers sweeps with a white feminine hand the long hair that is falling over his face—he has half forgotten, he is a little mixed in the opening of the story, and he is striving in English to "scamp," in French to *escamoter*. "The family are watching, death if he is

caught, if he fails to kill the French sentry. The cry of a bird, some vague sound attracts the sentry, he turns; all is lost. The Spaniard is seized. Martial law, Spanish conspiracy must be put down. The French General is a man of iron " (Villiers laughs, a short, hesitating laugh that is characteristic of him, and continues in his abrupt, uncertain way), " man of iron; not only he declares that the spy must be beheaded, but also the entire family—a man of iron that, ha, ha! and then, no you cannot, it is impossible for you to understand the enormity of the calamity—a thousand years before the conquest of the Moors, a Spaniard alone could—there is no one here, ha, ha! I was forgetting—the utter extinction of a great family of the name, the oldest and noblest of all the families in Spain, it is not easy to understand that, no, not easy here in the Nouvelle Athènes—ha, ha, one must belong to a great family to understand, ha, ha!

" The father beseeches, he begs that one member may be spared to continue the name—the youngest son—that is all; if he could be saved, the rest—what matter? death is nothing to a Spaniard; the family, the name, a thousand years of name is everything. The General is, you know, 'a man of iron.' 'Yes, one member of your family shall be respited, but on one condition.' To the agonized family conditions are as nothing. But they don't know the man of iron is determined to make a terrible example, and they cry 'Any conditions.' 'He who is respited must serve as executioner to the others.' Great is the doom: you understand; but after all the name must be saved. Then in the family council the father goes to his youngest son and says, 'I have been a good father to you, my son; I have always been a kind father, have I not? answer me; I have never refused you anything. Now you will not fail us, you will prove yourself worthy of the great name you bear. Remember your great ancestor who defeated the Moors, remember.' " (Villiers strives to get in a little local colour, but his knowledge of Spanish names and history is limited, and he in a certain

sense fails.) " Then the mother comes to her son and says, 'My son, I have been a good mother, I have always loved you; say you will not desert us in this hour of our great need.' Then the little sister comes, and the whole family kneels down and appeals to the horror-stricken boy. . . .

" 'He will not prove himself unworthy of our name,' cries the father. 'Now, my son, courage, take the axe firmly, do what I ask you, courage, strike straight.' The father's head falls into the sawdust, the blood all over the white beard; then comes the elder brother, and then another brother; and then, oh, the little sister was almost more than he could bear, and the mother had to whisper, 'Remember your promise to your father, to your dead father.' The mother laid her head on the block, but he could not strike. 'Be not the first coward of our name, strike; remember your promise to us all,' and her head was struck off."

" And the son," the girl asks, " what became of him?"

" He never was seen, save at night, walking, a solitary man, beneath the walls of his castle in Granada."

" And whom did he marry?"

" He never married."

Then after a long silence someone said—

" Whose story is that?"

" Balzac's."

At that moment the glass door of the *café* grated upon the sanded floor, and Manet entered. Although by birth and by art essentially a Parisian, there was something in his appearance and manner of speaking that often suggested an Englishman. Perhaps it was his dress—his clean-cut clothes and figure. That figure! those square shoulders that swaggered as he went across a room, and the thin waist; and that face, the beard and nose, satyr-like shall I say? No, for I would evoke an idea of beauty of line united to that of intellectual expression—frank words, frank passion in his convictions, loyal and simple phrases, clear as well-water, sometimes a little hard, sometimes, as they flowed away, bitter,

but at the fountain-head sweet and full of light. He sits next to Degas, that round-shouldered man in suit of pepper-and-salt. There is nothing very trenchantly French about him either, except the large necktie; his eyes are small, and his words are sharp, ironical, cynical. These two men are the leaders of the impressionist school. Their friendship has been jarred by inevitable rivalry. "Degas was painting 'Semiramis' when I was painting 'Modern Paris,'" says Manet. "Manet is in despair because he cannot paint atrocious pictures like Durand, and be fêted and decorated; he is an artist, not by inclination, but by force. He is as a galley slave chained to the oar," says Degas. Different, too, are their methods of work. Manet paints his whole picture from nature, trusting his instinct to lead him aright through the devious labyrinth of selection. Nor does his instinct ever fail him, there is a vision in his eyes which he calls nature, and which he paints unconsciously as he digests his food, thinking and declaring vehemently that the artist should not seek a synthesis, but should paint merely what he sees. This extraordinary oneness of nature and artistic vision does not exist in Degas, and even his portraits are composed from drawings and notes. About midnight Catulle Mendès will drop in, when he has corrected his proofs. He will come with his fine paradoxes and his strained eloquence. He will lean towards you, he will take you by the arm, and his presence is a nervous pleasure. And when the *café* is closed, when the last bock has been drunk, we shall walk about the great moonlight of the Place Pigalle, and through the dark shadows of the streets, talking of the last book published, he hanging on to my arm, speaking in that high febrile voice of his, every phrase luminous, aerial, even as the soaring moon and the fitful clouds. Duranty, an unknown Stendhal, will come in for an hour or so; he will talk little and go away quietly; he knows, and his whole manner shows that he knows, that he is a defeated man; and if you ask him why he does not write another novel, he will say, "What's the good? it would not be

read ; no one read the others, and I mightn't do even as well if I tried again." Paul Alexis, Léon Dierx, Pissarro, Cabaner, are also frequently seen in the Nouvelle Athènes.

Cabaner ! the world knows not the names of those who scorn the world ; somewhere in one of the great populous churchyards of Paris there is a forgotten grave, and there lies Cabaner. Cabaner ! since the beginning there have been, to the end of time there shall be, Cabaners ; and they shall live miserably, and they shall die miserable, and shall be forgotten ; and there shall never arise a novelist great enough to make live in art that eternal spirit of devotion, disinterestedness, and aspiration, which in each generation incarnates itself in one heroic soul. Better wast thou than those who stepped to opulence and fame upon thee fallen ; better, loftier-minded, purer ; thy destiny was to fall that others might rise upon thee, thou wert one of the noble legion of the conquered ; let praise be given to the conquered, for with them lies the brunt of victory. Child of the pavement, of strange sonnets and stranger music, I remember thee ; I remember the silk shirts, the four sous of Italian cheese, the roll of bread, and the glass of milk, the streets were thy dining-room. And the five-mile walk daily to the suburban music-hall where five francs were earned by playing the accompaniments of comic songs. And the wonderful room on the fifth floor, which was furnished when that celebrated heritage of two thousand francs was paid. I remember the fountain that was bought for a wardrobe, and the American organ with all the instruments of the orchestra, and the plaster casts under which the homeless ones that were never denied a refuge and a crust by thee slept. I remember all, and the buying of the life-size " Vénus de Milo." Something extraordinary would be done with it, I knew, but the result exceeded my wildest expectation. The head must needs be struck off, so that the rapture of thy admiration should be secure from all jarring reminiscence of the streets.

Then the wonderful story of the tenor, the pork butcher,

who was heard giving out such a volume of sound that the sausages were set in motion above him; he was fed, clothed and educated on the five francs a day earned in the music hall in the avenue de la Motte Piquet; and when he made his début at the Théatre Lyrique, thou wast in the last stage of consumption and too ill to go to hear thy pupil's success. He was immediately engaged by Mapleson and taken to America.

I remember thy face, Cabaner; I can see it now—that long, sallow face ending in a brown beard, and the hollow eyes, the meagre arms covered with a silk shirt, contrasting strangely with the rest of the dress. In all thy privation and poverty, thou didst never forgo thy silk shirt. I remember the paradoxes and the aphorisms, if not the exact words, the glamour and the sentiment of a humour that was all thy own. Never didst thou laugh; no, not even when in discussing how silence might be rendered in music, thou didst say, with thy extraordinary Pyrenean accent, "*Pour rendre le silence en musique il me faudrait trois orchestres militaires.*" And when I did show thee some poor verses of mine, French verses, for at this time I hated and had partly forgotten my native language——

"My dear George Moore, you always write about love, the subject is nauseating."

"So it is, so it is; but after all Baudelaire wrote about love and lovers; his best poem. . . ."

"*C'est vrai, mais il s'agissait d'une charogne et cela relève beaucoup la chose.*"

I remember, too, a few stray snatches of thy extraordinary music, "music that might be considered by Wagner as a little too advanced, but which Liszt would not fail to understand"; also thy settings of sonnets where the *melody* was continued uninterruptedly from the first line to the last; and that still more marvellous feat, thy setting, likewise with unbroken melody, of Villon's ballade "Les Dames du Temps Jadis"; and that out-Cabanering of Cabaner, the putting to music

of Cros's "Hareng Saur."

And why didst thou remain ever poor and unknown? Because of something too much, or something too little? Because of something too much! so I think, at least; thy heart was too full of too pure an ideal, too far removed from all possible contagion with the base crowd.

But, Cabaner, thou didst not labour in vain; thy destiny, though obscure, was a valiant and fruitful one; and, as in life thou didst live for others, so now in death thou dost live in others. Thou wast in an hour of wonder and strange splendour when the last tints and lovelinesses of romance lingered in the deepening west; when out of the clear east rose with a mighty effulgence of colour and lawless light Realism; when showing aloft in the dead pallor of the zenith, like a white flag fluttering faintly, Symbolists and Decadents appeared. Never before was there so sudden a flux and conflux of artistic desire, such aspiration in the soul of man, such rage of passion, such fainting fever, such cerebral erethism. The roar and dust of the daily battle of the realists was continued under the flush of the sunset, the arms of the Romantics glittered, the pale spiritual Symbolists watched and waited, none knowing yet of their presence. In such an hour of artistic convulsion and renewal of thought thou wast, and thou wast a magnificent rallying-point for all comers; it was thou who didst theorize our confused aspirations, and by thy holy example didst save us from all base commercialism, from all hateful prostitution; thou wast ever our high priest, and from thy high altar turned to us the white host, the ideal, the true and living God of all men.

Cabaner, I see you now entering the Nouvelle Athènes; you are a little tired after your long weary walk, but you lament not and you never cry out against the public that will accept neither your music nor your poetry. But though you are tired and footsore, you are ready to æstheticize till the *café* closes; for you the homeless ones are waiting: there they are, some three or four, and you will take them to your

strange room, furnished with the American organ, the fountain, and the decapitated Venus, and you will give them a crust each and cover them with what clothes you have; and, when clothes are lacking, with plaster casts, and though you will take but a glass of milk yourself, you will find a few sous to give them lager to cool their thirsty throats. So you have ever lived—a blameless life is yours, no base thought has ever entered there, not even a woman's love; art and friends, that is all.

Reader, do you know of anything more angelic? If you do you are more fortunate than I have been.

CHAP. VIII

THE SYNTHESIS OF THE NOUVELLE ATHÈNES

Two dominant notes in my character—an original hatred of my native country, and a brutal loathing of the religion I was brought up in. All the aspects of my native country are violently disagreeable to me, and I cannot think of the place I was born in without a sensation akin to nausea. These feelings are inherent and inveterate in me, I am instinctively averse from my own countrymen; they are at once remote and repulsive; but with Frenchmen I am conscious of a sense of nearness; I am one with them in their ideas and aspirations, and when I am with them, I am alive with a keen and penetrating sense of intimacy. Shall I explain this by atavism? Was there a French man or woman in my family some half-dozen generations ago? I have not inquired. The English I love, and with a love that is foolish—mad, for it is limitless; I love them better than the French, but I am not so near to them. Dear, sweet, Protestant England claims me. Every aspect of it raises me above myself, and there is perhaps no moment in my life more intense than when I stand and gaze admiring the red tiles of the farmhouse, the elms, the great hedgerows and all the rich fields adorned with

spreading trees and smock frocks. My soul is cheered by the sight of a windmill or a smock, we find neither in the north; the north is Celtic and I am by ancestry a South Saxon. The county of my instinctive aspiration would be Sussex, the most Saxon of all. Its every aspect awakens antenatal sympathies in me. The villages clustered round the greens with spires of the churches pointing between the elms were never new to me. When I saw them for the first time they were familiar; and the church bells calling the folk to prayer, to sweet-smelling churches, without candles, without incense, drew my feet instinctively. I followed, and learnt to love God in Protestantism and to understand that when England ceases to be Protestant she will decline into the equivalent of the poor Celt who worships his priest and shoots his landlord. France never was Catholic, no nation is, and nowhere in France does the Catholic banner hang so limp as in the Nouvelle Athènes.

•

Garçon, un bock! I write to please myself, just as I order my dinner; if my books sell I cannot help it—it is an accident.

But you live by writing.

Yes, but life is only an accident—art is eternal.

What I reproach Zola with is that he has no style; there is nothing you won't find in Zola from Chateaubriand to the reporting in the *Figaro*.

He seeks immortality in an exact description of a linen-draper's shop; if the shop conferred immortality it should be upon the linendraper who created the shop, and not on the novelist who described it.

And his last novel "L'Œuvre," how spun out, and for a franc a line in the "Gil Blas." Not a single new or even exact observation. And that terrible phrase repeated over and over again—"La Conquête de Paris." What does it mean? I never knew anyone who thought of conquering Paris: no one ever spoke of conquering Paris except, perhaps, two or three provincials.

You must have rules in poetry, if it is only for the pleasure of breaking them, just as you must have women dressed, if it is only for the pleasure of undressing them.

Fancy, a banquet was given to Julien by his pupils! He made a speech in favour of Lefebvre, and hoped that everyone there would vote for Lefebvre. Julien was very eloquent. He spoke of *Le grand art*, *le nu*, and Lefebvre's unswerving fidelity to *le nu* . . . elegance, refinement, an echo of ancient Greece: and then—what do you think? when he had exhausted all the reasons why the medal of honour should be given to Lefebvre, he said, "I ask you to remember, gentlemen, that he has a wife and eight children." Is it not monstrous?

But it is you who are monstrous, you who expect to fashion the whole world in conformity with your æstheticisms . . . a vain dream, and if realized it would result in an impossible world. A wife and children are the bases of existence, and it is folly to cry out because an appeal to such interests as these meets with response . . . it will be so till the end of time.

And these great interests that are to continue to the end of time began two years ago, when your pictures were not praised in the *Figaro* as much as you thought they should be.

Love—but not marriage. Marriage means a four-post bed and papa and mamma between eleven and twelve. Love is aspiration: transparencies, colour, light, a sense of the unreal. But a wife—you know all about her—who her father was, who her mother was, what she thinks of you and her opinion of the neighbours over the way. Where, then, is the dream, the *au dela*? But the women one has never seen before, that one will never see again! The choice! the enervation of burning odours, the baptismal whiteness of women, light, ideal tissues, eyes strangely dark with kohl, names that evoke palm trees and ruins, Spanish moonlight or maybe Persepolis! The nightingale-harmony of an eternal yes—the whisper of

a sweet unending yes. The unknown, the unreal. This is love. There is delusion, an *au dela.*

Good heavens! and the world still believes in education, in teaching people the "grammar of art." Education should be confined to clerks, and it drives even them to drink. Will the world learn that we never learn anything that we did not know before? The artist, the poet, painter, musician, and novelist go straight to the food they want, guided by an unerring and ineffable instinct; to teach them is to destroy the nerve of the artistic instinct. Art flees before the art school . . . "correct drawing," "solid painting." Is it impossible to teach people, to force it into their heads that there is no such thing as correct drawing, and that if drawing were correct it would be wrong? Solid painting; good heavens! Do they suppose that there is one sort of painting that is better than all others, and that there is a receipt for making it as for making chocolate? Art is not mathematics, it is individuality. It does not matter how badly you paint, so long as you don't paint badly like other people. Education destroys individuality. That great studio of Julien's is a sphinx, and all the poor folk that go there for artistic education are devoured. After two years they all paint and draw alike, every one; that vile execution—they call it execution—*la pâte, la peinture au premier coup.* I was over in England last year, and I saw some portraits by a man called Richmond. They were horrible, but I liked them because they weren't like painting. Stott and Sargent are clever fellows enough; I like Stott the best. If they had remained at home and hadn't been taught, they might have developed a personal art, but the trail of the serpent is over all they do—that vile French painting, *le morceau,* etc. Stott is getting over it by degrees. He exhibited a nymph this year. I know what he meant; it was an interesting intention. I liked his little landscapes better . . . simplified into nothing, into a couple of primitive

tints, wonderful clearness, light. But I doubt if he will find a public to understand all that.

Democratic art! Art is the direct antithesis to democracy. . . . Athens! a few thousand citizens who owned many thousand slaves, call that democracy! No! what I am speaking of is modern democracy—the mass. The mass can only appreciate simple and naïve emotions, puerile prettiness, above all conventionalities. See the Americans that come over here; what do they admire? Is it Degas or Manet they admire? No, Bouguereau and Lefebvre. What was most admired at the International Exhibition?—The Dirty Boy. And if the medal of honour had been decided by a *plébiscite,* The Dirty Boy would have had an overwhelming majority. What is the literature of the people? The idiotic stories of the *Petit Journal.* Don't talk of Shakespeare, Molière and the masters; they are accepted on the authority of the centuries. If the people could understand "Hamlet," the people would not read the *Petit Journal;* if the people could understand Michel Angelo, they would not look at our Bouguereau or your Bouguereau, Sir F. Leighton. For the last hundred years we have been going rapidly towards democracy, and what is the result? The destruction of the handicrafts. That there are still good pictures painted and good poems written proves nothing, there will always be found men to sacrifice their lives for a picture or a poem. But the decorative arts which are executed in collaboration, and depend for support on the general taste of a large number, have ceased to exist. Explain that if you can. I'll give you five thousand, ten thousand francs to buy a beautiful clock that is not a copy and is not ancient, and you can't do it. Such a thing does not exist. Look here, I was going up the staircase of the Louvre the other day. They were putting up a mosaic; it was horrible; everyone knows it is horrible. Well, I asked who had given the order for this mosaic, and I could not find out; no one knew. An order is passed

from bureau to bureau, and no one is responsible; and it will be always so in a republic, and the more republican you are the worse it will be.

The world is dying of machinery; that is the great disease, that is the plague that will sweep away and destroy civilization; man will have to rise against it sooner or later. . . . Capital, unpaid labour, wage-slaves, and all the rest—stuff. . . . Look at these plates; they were painted by machinery; they are abominable. Look at them. In old times plates were painted by the hand, and the supply was necessarily limited to the demand, and a china in which there was always something more or less pretty was turned out; but now thousands, millions of plates are made more than we want, and there is a commercial crisis; the thing is inevitable. I say the great and the reasonable revolution will be when mankind rises in revolt, and smashes the machinery and restores the handicrafts.

Goncourt is not an artist, notwithstanding all his affectation and outcries: he is not an artist. *Il me fait l'effet* of an old woman shrieking after immortality and striving to beat down some fragment of it with a broom. Once it was a duet, now it is a solo. They wrote novels, history, plays, they collected *bric-à-brac*—they wrote about their *bric-à-brac;* they painted in water-colours, they etched—they wrote about their water-colours and etchings; they have made a will settling that the *bric-à-brac* is to be sold at their death, and the proceeds applied to founding a prize for the best essay or novel, I forget which it is. They wrote about the prize they are going to found; they kept a diary, they wrote down everything they heard, felt, or saw, *radotage de vieille femme;* nothing must escape, not the slightest word; it might be that very word that might confer on them immortality; everything they heard, or said, must be of value, of inestimable value. A real artist does not trouble himself about immortality, about everything he hears, feels and says; he treats ideas and

sensations as so much clay wherewith to create.

And then the famous collaboration; how it was talked about, written about, prayed about; and when Jules died, what a subject for talk, for articles: it all went into pot. Hugo's vanity was titanic, Goncourt's is puerile.

And Daudet?

Oh, Daudet, *c'est de la bouillabaisse.*

Whistler, of all artists, is the least impressionist; the idea people have of his being an impressionist only proves once again the absolute inability of the public to understand the merits or the demerits of artistic work. Whistler's art is classical; he thinks of nature, but he does not see nature; he is guided by his mind, and not by his eyes; and the best of it is he says so. He knows it well enough! Anyone who knows him must have heard him say, "Painting is absolutely scientific; it is an exact science." And his work is in accord with his theory; he risks nothing, all is brought down, arranged, balanced, and made one; his pictures are thought out beforehand, they are mental conceptions. I admire his work; I am showing how he is misunderstood, even by those who think they understand. Does he ever seek a pose that is characteristic of the model, a pose that the model repeats oftener than any other?—Never. He advances the foot, puts the hand on the hip, etc., with a view to rendering his *idea.* Take his portrait of Duret. Did he ever see Duret in dress clothes? Probably not. Did he ever see Duret with a lady's opera cloak?—I am sure he never did. Is Duret in the habit of going to the theatre with ladies? No, he is a *littérateur* who is always in men's society, rarely in ladies'. But these facts mattered nothing to Whistler as they matter to Degas, or to Manet. Whistler took Duret out of his environment, dressed him up, thought out a scheme—in a word, painted his idea without concerning himself in the least with the model. Mark you, I deny that I am urging any fault or flaw; I am merely contending that Whistler's art is not

modern art, but classic art—yes, and severely classical, far more classical than Titian's or Velasquez'; from an opposite pole as classical as Ingres'. No Greek dramatist ever sought the synthesis of things more uncompromisingly than Whistler. And he is right. Art is not nature. Art is nature digested. Zola and Goncourt cannot, or will not understand that the artistic stomach must be allowed to do its work in its own mysterious fashion. If a man is really an artist he will remember what is necessary, forget what is useless; but if he takes notes he will interrupt his artistic digestion, and the result will be a lot of little touches, inchoate and wanting in the elegant rhythm of the synthesis.

I am sick of synthetical art; we want observation direct and unreasoned. What I reproach Millet with is that it is always the same thing, the same peasant, the same *sabot*, the same sentiment. You must admit that it is somewhat stereotyped.

What does that matter; what is more stereotyped than Japanese art? But that does not prevent it from being always beautiful.

People talk of Manet's originality; that is just what I can't see. What he has got, and what you can't take away from him, is a magnificent execution. A piece of still life by Manet is the most wonderful thing in the world; vividness of colour, breadth, simplicity, and directness of touch—marvellous!

French translation is the only translation; in England you still continue to translate poetry into poetry, instead of into prose. We used to do the same, but we have long ago renounced such follies. Either of two things—if the translator is a good poet, he substitutes his verse for that of the original—I don't want his verse, I want the original—if he is a bad poet, he gives us bad verse, which is intolerable. Where the original poet puts an effect of cæsura, the translator

puts an effect of rhyme; where the original poet puts an effect of rhyme, the translator puts an effect of cæsura. Take Longfellow's "Dante." Does it give as good an idea of the original as our prose translation? Is it as interesting reading? Take Bayard Taylor's translation of "Goethe." Is it readable? Not to anyone with an ear for verse. Will anyone say that Taylor's would be read if the original did not exist? The fragment translated by Shelley is beautiful, but then it is Shelley. Look at Swinburne's translations of Villon. They are beautiful poems by Swinburne, that is all; he makes Villon speak of a "splendid kissing mouth." Villon could not have done this unless he had read Swinburne. "Heine," translated by James Thomson, is not different from Thomson's original poems; "Heine," translated by Sir Theodore Martin, is doggerel.

But in English blank verse you can translate quite as literally as you could into prose?

I doubt it, but even so, the rhythm of the blank line would carry your mind away from that of the original.

But if you don't know the original?

The rhythm of the original can be suggested in prose judiciously used; even if it isn't, your mind is at least free, whereas the English rhythm must destroy the sensation of something foreign. There is no translation except a word-for-word translation. Baudelaire's translation of Poe, and Hugo's translation of Shakespeare, are marvellous in this respect; a pun or joke that is untranslatable is explained in a note.

But that is the way young ladies translate—word for word!

No; 'tis just what they don't do; they think they are translating word for word, but they aren't. All the proper names, no matter how unpronounceable, must be rigidly

adhered to ; you must never transpose versts into kilometres, or roubles into francs ; I don't know what a verst is or what a rouble is, but when I see the words I am in Russia. Every proverb must be rendered literally, even if it doesn't make very good sense : if it doesn't make sense at all, it must be explained in a note. For example, there is a proverb in German : "*Quand le cheval est sellé il faut le monter*" ; in French there is a proverb : "*Quand le vin est tiré il faut le boire.*" Well, a translator who would translate *quand le cheval*, etc., by *quand le vin*, etc., is an ass, and does not know his business. In translation only a strictly classical language should be used ; no word of slang, or even word of modern origin should be employed ; the translator's aim should be never to dissipate the illusion of an exotic. If I were translating the "Assommoir" into English, I should strive after a strong, flexible, but colourless language, something—what shall I say ?—the style of the modern Addison.

What, don't you know the story about Mendès ?—when *Chose* wanted to marry his sister ? *Chose's* mother, it appears, went to live with a priest. The poor fellow was dreadfully cut up ; he was broken-hearted ; and he went to Mendès, his heart swollen with grief, determined to make a clean breast of it, let the worst come to the worst. After a great deal of beating about the bush, and apologizing, he got it out. You know Mendès, you can see him smiling a little ; and looking at *Chose* with that white cameo face of his he said, "*Avec quel meilleur homme voulez-vous que votre mère se mit ? vous n'avez donc, jeune homme, aucun sentiment religieux.*"

Victor Hugo, he is a painter on porcelain ; his verse is mere decoration, long tendrils and flowers ; and the same thing over and over again.

How to be happy !—not to read Baudelaire and Verlaine, not to enter the Nouvelle Athènes, unless perhaps to play

dominoes like the *bourgeois* over there, not to do anything that would awake a too intense consciousness of life—to live in a sleepy countryside, to have a garden to work in, to have a wife and children, to chatter quietly every evening over the details of existence. We must have the azaleas out to-morrow and thoroughly cleansed, they are devoured by insects ; the tame rook has flown away ; mother lost her Prayer Book coming from church, she thinks it was stolen. A good, honest, well-to-do peasant, who knows nothing of politics, must be very nearly happy—and to think there are people who would educate, who would draw these people out of the calm satisfaction of their instincts, and give them passions ! The philanthropist is the Nero of modern times.

CHAP. IX

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER

" Why did you not send a letter ? We have all been writing to you for the last six months, but no answer—none. Had you written one word I would have saved all. The poor concierge was in despair ; she said the *propriétaire* would wait if you had only said when you were coming back, or if you had only let us know what you wished to be done. Three quarters' rent was due, and no news could be obtained of you, so an auction had to be called. It nearly broke my heart to see those horrid men tramping over the delicate carpets, their coarse faces set against the sweet colour of that beautiful English cretonne. . . . And all the while the pastel by Manet, the great hat set like an aureole about the face—' the eyes deep set in crimson shadow,' ' the fan wide-spread across the bosom ' (you see I am quoting your own words), looking down, the mistress of that little paradise of tapestry. She seemed to resent the intrusion. I looked once or twice half expecting those eyes ' deep set in crimson shadow ' to fill

with tears. But nothing altered her great dignity; she seemed to see all, but as a Buddha she remained impenetrable. . . .

"I was there the night before the sale. I looked through the books, taking notes of those I intended to buy—those which we used to read together when the snow lay high about the legs of the poor faun in *terre cuite*, that laughed amid the frosty *boulingrins*. I found a large packet of letters which I instantly destroyed. You should not be so careless; I wonder how it is that men are always careless about their letters.

"The sale was announced for one o'clock. I wore a thick veil, for I did not wish to be recognized; the concierge of course knew me, but she can be depended upon. The poor old woman was in tears, so sorry was she to see all your pretty things sold up. You left owing her a hundred francs, but I have paid her; and talking of you we waited till the auctioneer arrived. Everything had been pulled down; the tapestry from the walls, the picture, the two vases I gave you were on the table waiting for the stroke of the hammer. And then the men, all the *marchands de meubles* in the *quartier*, came upstairs, spitting and talking coarsely—their foul voices went through me. They stamped, spat, pulled the things about, nothing escaped them. One of them held up the Japanese dressing-gown and made some horrible jokes; and the auctioneer, who was a humorist, answered, 'If there are any ladies' men present, we shall have some spirited bidding.' The pastel I bought, and I shall keep it and try to find some excuse to satisfy my husband, but I send you the miniature, and I hope you will not let it be sold again. There were many other things I should have liked to buy, but I did not dare—the organ that you used to play hymns on and I waltzes on, the Turkish lamp which we could never agree about . . . but when I saw the satin shoes which I gave you to carry the night of that adorable ball, and which you would not give back, but nailed up on the wall on either side of your bed and put matches in, I was seized with an almost invincible desire to

steal them. I don't know why, *un caprice de femme*. No one but you would have ever thought of converting satin shoes into match boxes. I wore them at that delicious ball; we danced all night together, and you had an explanation with my husband (I was a little afraid for a moment, but it came out all right), and we went and sat on the balcony in the soft warm moonlight; we watched the glitter of epaulets and gas, the satin of the bodices, the whiteness of passing shoulders: we dreamed the massy darkness of the park, the fairy light along the lawny spaces, the heavy perfume of the flowers, the pink of the camellias; and you quoted something: '*Les camélias du balcon ressemblent à des désirs mourants.*' It was horrid of you: but you always had a knack of rubbing one up the wrong way. Then do you not remember how we danced in one room, while the servants set the other out with little tables? That supper was fascinating! I suppose it was these pleasant remembrances which made me wish for the shoes, but I could not summon up courage enough to buy them, and the horrid people were comparing me with the pastel; I suppose I did look a little mysterious with a double veil bound across my face. The shoes went with a lot of other things—and oh, to whom?

"So now that pretty little retreat in the Rue de la Tour des Dames is ended for ever for you and me. We shall not see the faun in *terre cuite* again; I was thinking of going to see him the other day, but the street is so steep; my coachman advised me to spare the horse's hind legs. I believe it is the steepest street in Paris. And your luncheon parties, how I did enjoy them, and how Fay did enjoy them too; and what I risked, short-sighted as I am, picking my way from the tramcar down to that out-of-the-way little street! Men never appreciate the risks women run for them. But to leave my letters lying about—I cannot forgive that. When I told Fay she said, 'What can you expect? I warned you against flirting with boys.' I never did before—never.

"Paris is now just as it was when you used to sit on the

balcony and I read you Browning. You never liked his poetry, and I cannot understand why. I have found a new poem which I am sure would convert you ; you should be here. There are lilacs in the room and the *Mont Valérien* is beautiful upon a great lemon sky, and the long avenue is merging into violet vapour.

" We have already begun to think of where we shall go to this year. Last year we went to P——, an enchanting place, quite rustic, but within easy distance of a casino. I had vowed not to dance, for I had been out every night during the season, but the temptation proved irresistible, and I gave way. There were two young men here, one the Count of B——, the other the Marquis of G——, one of the best families in France, a distant cousin of my husband. He has written a book which everyone says is one of the most amusing things that have appeared for years, *c'est surtout très Parisien.* He paid me great attentions, and made my husband wildly jealous. I used to go out and sit with him amid the rocks, and it was perhaps very lucky for me that he went away. We may return there this year ; if so, I wish you would come and spend a month ; there is an excellent hotel where you would be very comfortable. We have decided nothing as yet. The Duchesse de —— is giving a costume ball ; they say it is going to be a most wonderful affair. I don't know what money is not going to be spent upon the cotillion. I have just got home a fascinating toilette. I am going as a *Pierrette ;* you know, a short skirt and a little cap. The Marquise gave a ball some few days ago. I danced the cotillion with L——, who, as you know, dances divinely ; *il m'a fait la cour*, but it is of course no use, you know that.

" The other night we went to see the '*Maître de Forges*,' a fascinating play, and I am reading the book ; I don't know which I like the best. I think the play, but the book is very good too. Now that is what I call a novel ; and I am a judge ; for I have read all novels. But I must not talk literature, or you will say something stupid. I wish you would

not make foolish remarks about men that *tout-Paris* considers the cleverest. It does not matter so much with me, I know you, but then people laugh at you behind your back, and that is not nice for me. The *marquise* was here the other day, and she said she almost wished you would not come on her 'days,' so extraordinary were the remarks you made. And by the way, the *marquise* has written a book. I have not seen it, but I hear that it is really too *décolleté*. She is *une femme d'esprit*, but the way she affiché's herself is too much for anyone. She never goes anywhere now without *le petit* D——. It is a great pity.

"And now, my dear friend, write me a nice letter, and tell me when you are coming back to Paris. I am sure you cannot amuse yourself in that hateful London; the nicest thing about you was that you were really *très Parisien*. Come back and take a nice apartment on the Champs Elysées. You might come back for the Duchesse's ball. I will get an invitation for you, and will keep the cotillion for you. The idea of running away as you did, and never telling anyone where you were going to. I always said you were a little cracked. And letting all your things be sold! If you had only told me! I should like so much to have had that Turkish lamp. Yours——"

How like her that letter is—egotistical, vain, foolish; no, not foolish—narrow, limited, but not foolish; worldly, oh, how worldly! and yet not repulsively so, for there always was in her a certain intensity of feeling that saved her from the commonplace, and gave her charm. She can feel, and she has lived her life and felt it acutely, and sincerely . . . like a moth caught in a gauze curtain! Would that preclude sincerity? Sincerity seems to convey an idea of depth, and she was not very deep, that is quite certain—a little brain that span rapidly and hummed a pretty humming tune. But no, there was something more in her than that. She often said things that I thought clever, things that I did not forget,

things that I should like to put into books. But it was not brain power; it was only intensity of feeling—nervous feeling. I don't know . . . perhaps. . . . She has lived her life; within certain limits she has lived her life. None of us do more than that. True. I remember the first time I saw her. Sharp, little, and merry—a changeable little sprite. I thought she had ugly hands; so she has, and yet I forgot all about her hands before I had known her a month. It is now seven years ago. How time passes! I was very young then. What battles we have had, what quarrels! Still we had good times together. She never lost sight of me, but no intrusion; far too clever for that. I never got the better of her but once . . . once I did, *enfin!* She soon made up for lost ground. I wonder what the charm was. I did not think her pretty, I did not think her clever; but I could not get her out of my head. I never knew if she cared for me, never, but there were moments when. . . . Curious, febrile, subtle little creature, oh, infinitely subtle, subtle in everything, in her sensations subtle; I suppose that was her charm, subtleness. I never knew if she cared for me, I never knew if she hated her husband—one never knew her—I never knew how she would receive me. The last time I saw her . . . that stupid American would take her downstairs, no getting rid of him, and I was hiding behind one of the pillars in the Rue de Rivoli, my hand on the cab door. However, she could not blame me that time—and all the stories she used to invent of my indiscretions; I believe she used to get them up for the sake of the excitement. She was awfully silly in some ways, once you got her into a certain line; that marriage, that title, and she used to think of it night and day. I shall never forget when she went into mourning for the Count de Chambord. And her tastes, oh, how bourgeois they were! That salon; the flagrantly modern clock, brass work, eight hundred francs on the Boulevard St. Germain, the cabinets, brass work, the rich brown carpet, and the furniture set all round the room geometrically, the great gilt mirror, the ancestral portrait, the arms and crest everywhere, and the stuffy

bourgeois sense of comfort ; a little grotesque no doubt—the mechanical admiration for all that is about her, for the general atmosphere ; the *Figaro*, that is to say Albert Wolf, *l'homme le plus spirituel de Paris, c'est-à-dire, dans le monde*, the success of Georges Ohnet and the talent of Gustave Doré : But with all this vulgarity of taste certain appreciations, certain ebullitions of sentiment, within the radius of sentiment certain elevations and depravities—depravities in the legitimate sense of the word, that is to say, a revolt against the commonplace. . . .

Ha, ha, ha ! how I have been dreaming ! I wish I had not been awoke from my reverie, it was pleasant.

The letter just read indicates, if it does not clearly tell, the changes that have taken place in my life ; and it is only necessary to say that one morning, a few months ago, when my servant brought me some summer honey and a glass of milk to my bedside, she handed me an unpleasant letter. My agent's handwriting, even when I knew the envelope contained a cheque, has never quite failed to produce a sensation of repugnance in me—so hateful is any sort of account, that I avoid as much as possible even knowing how I stand at my banker's. Therefore the odour of honey and milk, so evocative of fresh flowers and fields, was spoilt that morning for me ; and it was some time before I slipped on that beautiful Japanese dressing-gown, which I shall never see again, and read the odious epistle.

That some wretched farmers and miners should refuse to starve, that I may not be deprived of my *demi-tasse* at *Tortoni's*, that I may not be forced to leave this beautiful retreat, my cat and my python—monstrous. And these wretched creatures will find moral support in England ; they will find pity !

Pity, that most vile of all vile virtues, has never been known to me. The great pagan world I love knew it not. Now the world proposes to interrupt the terrible austere laws of nature which ordain that the weak shall be trampled upon, shall be ground into death and dust, that the strong shall be really

strong—that the strong shall be glorious, sublime. A little bourgeois comfort, a little bourgeois sense of right, cry the moderns.

Hither the world has been drifting since the coming of the pale socialist of Galilee ; and this is why I hate Him, and deny His divinity. His divinity is falling, it is evanescent in sight of the goal He dreamed ; again He is denied by His disciples. Poor fallen God ! I, who hold nought else pitiful, pity Thee, Thy bleeding face and hands and feet, Thy hanging body ; Thou at least art picturesque, and in a way beautiful in the midst of the sombre mediocrity, towards which Thou hast drifted for two thousand years, a flag ; and in which Thou shalt find Thy doom as I mine, I, who will not adore Thee and cannot curse Thee now. For verily Thy life and Thy fate has been greater, stranger and more Divine than any man's has been. The chosen people, the garden, the betrayal, the crucifixion, and the beautiful story, not of Mary, but of Magdalen. The God descending to the Magdalen ! Even the great pagan world of marble and pomp and lust and cruelty, that my soul goes out to and hails as the grandest, has not so sublime a contrast to show us as this.

Come to me, ye who are weak. The Word went forth, the terrible disastrous Word, and before it fell the ancient gods, and the vices that they represent, and which I revere, are outcast now in the world of men ; the Word went forth, and the world interpreted the Word, blindly, ignorantly, savagely, for two thousand years, but nevertheless nearing every day the end—the end that Thou in Thy divine intelligence foresawest, that finds its voice to-day (enormous though the antithesis may be, I will say it) in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. What fate has been like Thine ? Betrayed by Judas in the garden, denied by Peter before the cock crew, crucified between thieves, and mourned for by a Magdalen, and then sent bound and bare, nothing changed, nothing altered, in Thy ignominious plight, forthward in the world's van the glory and symbol of man's new idea—Pity. Thy day is closing in, but the heavens are

now wider aflame with Thy light than ever before—Thy light, which I, a pagan, standing on the last verge of the old world, declare to be darkness, the coming night of pity and justice which is imminent, which is the twentieth century. The bearers have relinquished Thy cross, they leave Thee in the hour of Thy universal triumph, Thy crown of thorns is falling, Thy face is buffeted with blows, and not even a reed is placed in Thy hand for sceptre ; only I and mine are by Thee, we who shall perish with Thee, in the ruin Thou hast created.

Injustice we worship ; all that lifts us out of the miseries of life is the sublime fruit of injustice. Every immortal deed was an act of fearful injustice ; the world of grandeur, of triumph, of courage, of lofty aspiration, was built up on injustice. Man would not be man but for injustice. Hail, therefore, to the thrice glorious virtue injustice ! What care I that some millions of wretched Israelites died under Pharaoh's lash or Egypt's sun ? It was well that they died that I might have the pyramids to look on, or to fill a musing hour with wonderment. Is there one amongst us who would exchange them for the lives of the ignominious slaves that died ? What care I that the virtue of some sixteen-year-old maiden was the price paid for Ingres' " La Source " ? That the model died of drink and disease in the hospital, is nothing when compared with the essential that I should have " La Source," that exquisite dream of innocence, to think of till my soul is sick with delight of the painter's holy vision. Nay more, the knowledge that a wrong was done—that millions of Israelites died in torments, that a girl, or a thousand girls, died in the hospital for that one virginal thing, is an added pleasure which I could not afford to spare. Oh, for the silence of marble courts, for the shadow of great pillars, for gold, for reticulated canopies of lilies ; to see the great gladiators pass, to hear them cry the famous " Ave Cæsar," to hold the thumb down, to see the blood flow, to fill the languid hours with the agonies of poisoned slaves ! Oh, for excess, for crime ! I would give many lives to save one sonnet by Baudelaire ; for

the hymn, "*A la très chère, à la très belle, qui remplit mon cœur de clarté,*" let the first-born in every house in Europe be slain; and in all sincerity I profess my readiness to decapitate all the Japanese in Japan and elsewhere, to save from destruction one drawing by Hokusai. Again I say that all we deem sublime in the world's history are acts of injustice; and it is certain that if mankind does not relinquish at once, and for ever, its vain, mad, and fatal dream of justice, the world will lapse into barbarism. England was great and glorious, because England was unjust, and England's greatest son was the personification of injustice—Cromwell.

But the old world of heroes is over now. The skies above us are dark with sentimentalism, the sand beneath us is shoaling fast, we are running with streaming canvas upon ruin; all ideals have gone; nothing remains to us for worship but the Mass, the blind, inchoate, insatiate Mass; fog and fen land before us, we shall founder in putrefying mud, creatures of the ooze and rushes about us—we, the great ship that has floated up from the antique world. Oh, for the antique world, its plain passion, its plain joys in the sea, where the Triton blew a plaintive blast, and the forest where the whiteness of the nymph was seen escaping! We are weary of pity, we are weary of being good; we are weary of tears and effusion, and our refuge—the British Museum—is the wide sea shore and the wind of the ocean. There, there is real joy in the flesh; our statues are naked, but we are ashamed, and our nakedness is indecency: a fair, frank soul is mirrored in those fauns and nymphs; and how strangely enigmatic is the soul of the antique world, the bare, barbarous soul of beauty and of might!

CHAP. X

But neither Apollo nor Buddha could help or save me. One in his exquisite balance of body, a skylark-like song of eternal

beauty, stood lightly advancing; the other sat in sombre contemplation, calm as a beautiful evening. I looked for sorrow in the eyes of the pastel—the beautiful pastel that seemed to fill with a real presence the rich autumnal leaves where the jays darted and screamed. The twisted columns of the bed rose, burdened with great weight of fringes and curtains, the python devoured a guinea-pig, the last I gave him; the great white cat came to me. I said all this must go, must henceforth be to me an abandoned dream, a something, not more real than a summer meditation. So be it, and, as was characteristic of me, I broke with Paris suddenly, without warning anyone. I knew in my heart of hearts that I should never return, but no word was spoken, and I continued a pleasant delusion with myself; I told my concierge that I would return in a month, and I left all to be sold, brutally sold by auction, as the letter I read in the last chapter charmingly and touchingly describes.

Not even to Marshall did I confide my foreboding that Paris would pass out of my life, that it would henceforth be with me a beautiful memory, but never more a practical delight. He and I were no longer living together; we had parted a second time, but this time without bitterness of any kind; he had learnt to feel that I wanted to live alone, and had moved away into the Latin Quarter, whither I made occasional expeditions. I accompanied him once to the old haunts, but various terms of penal servitude had scattered our friends, and I could not interest myself in the new. Nor did Marshall himself interest me as he had once done. To my eager taste, he had grown just a little trite. My affection for him was as deep and sincere as ever; were I to meet him now I would grasp his hand and hail him with firm, loyal friendship; but I had made friends in the Nouvelle Athènes who interested me passionately, and my thoughts were absorbed by and set on new ideals, which Marshall had failed to find sympathy for, or even to understand. I had introduced him to Degas and Manet, but he had spoken of Jules Lefebvre and Bouguereau, and

generally shown himself incapable of any higher education; he could not enter where I had entered, and this was alienation. We could no longer even talk of the same people; when I spoke of a certain *marquise* he answered with an indifferent "Do you really think so?" and proceeded to drag me away from my glitter of satin to the dinginess of print dresses. It was more than alienation, it was almost separation; but he was still my friend, he was the man, and he always will be, to whom my youth, with all its aspirations, was most closely united. So I turned to say good-bye to him and to my past life. Rap—rap—rap!

"Who's there?"

"I—George Moore."

"I've got a model."

"Never mind your model. Open the door. How are you? what are you painting?"

"This; what do you think of it?"

"It is prettily composed. I think it will come out all right. I am going to England; come to say good-bye."

"Going to England! What will you do in England?"

"I have to go about money matters, very tiresome. I had really begun to forget there was such a place."

"But you are not going to stay there?"

"Oh, no!"

"You will be just in time to see the Academy."

The conversation turned on art, and we æstheticized for an hour. At last Marshall said, "I am really sorry, old chap, but I must send you away; there's that model."

The girl sat waiting, her pale hair hanging down her back, a very picture of discontent.

"Send her away."

"I asked her to come out to dinner."

"D—n her. . . . Well, never mind, I must spend this last evening with you; you shall both dine with me. *Je quitte Paris demain matin, peut-être pour longtemps; je voudrais passer ma dernière soirée avec mon ami; alors si vous voulez bien me*

permettre, mademoiselle, je vous invite tous les deux à dîner ; nous passerons la soirée ensemble si cela vous est agréable ?"

"*Je veux bien, monsieur.*"

Poor Marie ! Marshall and I were absorbed in each other and art. It was always so. We dined in a *gargote,* and afterwards we went to a students' ball ; and it seems like yesterday. I can see the moon sailing through a clear sky, and on the pavement's edge Marshall's beautiful slim, manly figure, and Marie's exquisite gracefulness. She was Lefebvre's Chloe ; so everyone sees her now. Her end was a tragic one. She invited her friends to dinner, and with the few pence that remained she bought some boxes of matches, boiled them, and drank the water. No one knew why ; some said it was love.

I went to London in an exuberant necktie, a tiny hat ; I wore large trousers and a Capoul beard ; looking, I believe, as unlike an Englishman as a drawing by Grévin. In the smoking-room of Morley's Hotel I met my agent, an immense nose, and a wisp of hair drawn over a bald skull. He explained, after some hesitation, that I owed him a few thousands and that the accounts were in his portmanteau. I suggested taking them to a solicitor to have them examined. The solicitor advised me strongly to contest them. I did not take the advice, but raised some money instead, and so the matter ended so far as the immediate future was concerned. The years that are most impressionable, from twenty to thirty, when the senses and the mind are the widest awake, I, the most impressionable of human beings, had spent in France, not among English residents, but among that which is the quintessence of the nation, not an indifferent spectator, but an enthusiast, striving heart and soul to identify himself with his environment, to shake himself free from race and language and to recreate himself as it were in the womb of a new nationality, assuming its ideals, its morals, and its modes of thought, and I had succeeded so well, that when I returned home every aspect of street and suburban garden was new to

me ; of the manner of life of Londoners I knew nothing. I went into a drawing-room, but everything seemed far away—a dream, a presentiment, nothing more ; I was in touch with nothing ; of the thoughts and feelings of those I met I could understand nothing, nor could I sympathize with them : an Englishman was at that time as much out of my mental reach as an Eskimo would be now. Women were nearer to me than men, and I will take this opportunity to note my observation, for I am not aware that anyone else has observed that the difference between the two races is found in the men, not in the women. French and English women are psychologically very similar ; the standpoint from which they see life is the same, the same thoughts interest and amuse them ; but the attitude of a Frenchman's mind is opposed to that of an Englishman's ; they stand on either side of a vast abyss, two animals different in colour, form, and temperament ; two ideas destined to remain separate and distinct.

I have heard of writing and speaking two languages equally well, but if I had remained two more years in France I should never have been able to identify my thoughts with the language I am now writing in, and I should have written it as an alien. It was in the last two years that I began to lose my English, and I remember very well indeed how one day, while arranging an act of a play I was writing with a friend, I found to my surprise that I could think more easily and rapidly in French than in English ; but with all this I did not learn French. I could write a sonnet or a ballade almost without a slip, but my prose required a good deal of alteration, and when I returned to London I could write English verse, but even ordinary newspaper prose was beyond my reach, and an attempt I made to write a novel drifted into failure.

Of my knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of the two languages I will give examples. Here is a poem that I translated aloud to Cabaner one night in the Nouvelle Athènes :

We are alone! Listen, a little while,
And hear the reason why your weary smile
And lute-toned speaking is so very sweet,
And how my love of you is more complete
Than any love of any lover. They
Have only been attracted by the grey
Delicious softness of your eyes, your slim
And delicate form, or some such other whim,
The simple pretexts of all lovers—I
For other reason. Listen whilst I try
To say. I joy to see the sunset slope
Beyond the weak hours' hopeless horoscope,
Leaving the heavens a melancholy calm
Of quiet colour chanted like a psalm,
In mildly modulated phrases; thus
Your life shall fade like a voluptuous
Vision beyond the sight, and you shall die
Like some soft evening's sad serenity . . .
I would possess your dying hours; indeed
My love is worthy of the gift, I plead
For them. Although I never loved as yet,
Methinks that I might love you; I would get
From out the knowledge that the time was brief
That tenderness, whose pity grows to grief,
And grief that sanctifies, a joy, a charm
Beyond all other loves, for now the arm
Of Death is stretched to you-ward, and he claims
You as his bride. Maybe my soul misnames
Its passion; love perhaps it is not, yet
To see you fading like a violet,
Or some sweet thought away, would be a strange
And costly pleasure, far beyond the range
Of formal man's emotion. Listen, I
Will choose a country spot where fields of rye
And wheat extend in rustling yellow plains,
Broken with wooded hills and leafy lanes,

To pass our honeymoon ; a cottage where
The porch and windows are festooned with fair
Green wreaths of eglantine, and look upon
A shady garden where we'll walk alone
In the autumn sunny evenings ; each will see
Our walks grow shorter, till the orange tree,
The garden's length, is far, and you will rest
From time to time, leaning upon my breast
Your languid lily face. Then later still
Unto the sofa by the window-sill
Your wasted body I shall carry, so
That you may drink the last left lingering glow
Of evening, when the air is filled with scent
Of blossoms ; and my spirit shall be rent
The while with many griefs. Like some blue day
That grows more lovely as it fades away,
Gaining that calm serenity and height
Of colour wanted, as the solemn night
Steals forward you will sweetly fall asleep
For ever and for ever ; I shall weep
A day and night large tears upon your face,
Laying you then beneath a rose-red place
Where I may muse and dedicate and dream
Volumes of poesy of you ; and deem
It happiness to know that you are far
From any base desires as that fair star
Set in the evening magnitude of heaven.
Death takes but little, yea, your death has given
Me that deep peace, and that secure possession
Which man may never find in earthly passion.

The poem entitled " Une Nuit de Septembre " tells of a very unplatonic encounter in the forests of Fontainebleau, and, perhaps, readers will be interested to hear that the lady still retains in face and figure many pleasant remembrances of her springtime, though, alas ! her whilom lover has fallen into the sere and yellow leaf.

NUIT DE SEPTEMBRE

La nuit est pleine de silence,
Et dans une étrange lueur,
Et dans une douce indolence
La lune dort comme une fleur.

Parmi les rochers, dans le sable,
Sous les grands pins d'un calme amer
Surgit mon amour périssable,
Faim de tes yeux, soif de ta chair.

Je suis ton amant, et ta blonde
Gorge tremble sous mon baiser,
Et le feu de l'amour inonde
Nos deux cœurs sans les apaiser.

Rien ne peut durer, mais ta bouche
Est telle qu'un fruit fait de sang ;
Tout passe, mais ta main me touche
Et je me donne en frémissant.

Tes yeux verts me regardent : j'aime
Le clair de lune de tes yeux,
Et je ne vois dans le ciel même
Que ton corps rare et radieux.

POUR UN TABLEAU DE LORD LEIGHTON

De quoi rêvent-elles ? de fleurs,
D'ombres, d'étoiles ou de pleurs ?
De quoi rêvent ces douces femmes ?
De leurs amours ou de leurs âmes ?

Pareilles aux lis abattus
Elles dorment les rêves tus

Dans la grande fenêtre ovale
Sous un ciel gris comme une opale.

POUR UN TABLEAU DE RUBENS

" Dans sa gracieuse pâleur
Elle vit ainsi qu'une fleur,
Évoquant une fraîche odeur
Par la transparente couleur.

" Loin de l'émotion charnelle,
Rubens, oubliant son modèle,
Pressentit la vie éternelle
Qui s'incarne un moment en elle.

" Sa pensée est dans cette main,
Dans sa pose et dans son dessin
Et dans ses yeux pleins du chemin
Que traverse le cœur humain.

" Néanmoins pour toute âme en peine
Que son calme altier rassérène,
Elle est l'image souveraine
De la vie éphémère et vaine."

VERS D'ALBUM

Je vois tes mains dans ma pensée
Jeunes mains fleurs de la rosée
Je vois ta main gauche posée

Comme par Ingres sur ton sein,
Et j'entre vois le beau dessin
Qu'il aurait fait d'après ta main.

THE SWEETNESS OF THE PAST

As sailors watch from their prison
For the faint grey line of the coasts,
I look to the past re-arisen,
And joys come over in hosts
Like the white sea birds from their roosts.

I love not the indelicate present,
The future's unknown to our quest,
To-day is the life of the peasant,
But the past is a haven of rest—
The things of the past are the best.

The rose of the past is better
Than the rose we ravish to-day,
'Tis holier, purer, and fitter
To place on the shrine where we pray
For the secret thoughts we obey.

In the past nothing dies, nothing changes,
In the past all is sacred and still ;
No grief nor fate that estranges,
Nor hope that no life can fulfil,
But ethereal shelter from ill.

The coarser delights of the hour
Tempt, and debauch, and deprave,
And we joy in a fugitive flower,
Knowing that nothing can save
Our flesh from the fate of the grave.

But sooner or later returning
In grief to the well-loved nest,
Filled with an infinite yearning,
We cry, there is rest, there is rest
In the past, its joys are the best.

NOSTALGIA

Fair were the dreamful days of old,
  When in the summer's sleepy shade,
Beneath the beeches on the wold,
  The shepherds lay and gently played
Music to maidens, who, afraid,
  Drew all together rapturously,
Their white soft hands like white leaves laid,
  In the old dear days of Arcady.

Men were not then as they are now
  Haunted and terrified by creeds,
They sought not then, nor cared to know
  The end that as a magnet leads,
Nor told with austere fingers beads,
  Nor reasoned with their grief and glee,
But rioted in pleasant meads
  In the old dear days of Arcady.

The future may be wrong or right,
  The present is a hopeless wrong,
For life and love have lost delight,
  And bitter even is our song ;
And year by year grey doubt grows strong,
  And death is all that seems to dree.
Wherefore with weary hearts we long
  For the old dear days of Arcady.

ENVOI

Glories and triumphs ne'er shall cease,
  But men may sound the heavens and sea,
One thing is lost for aye—the peace
  Of the old dear days of Arcady.

It would be easy for me to produce more poems in English and in French, for in youth I believed myself to be a poet ; my only doubt was whether my muse was French or English. But of what avail to print any more, since I have not written verse for many and many a year, and shall probably never write again in verse ? But as I write these lines a poem of old time starts up in my memory, and it is one that there is more reason for printing here than any other. I'm thinking of the sonnet in which I dedicate " Luther," a five-act drama, to Swinburne.

Je t'apporte mon drame, ô poète sublime,
Ainsi qu'un écolier au maître sa leçon :
Ce livre avec fierté porte comme écusson
Le sceau qu'en nos esprits ta jeune gloire imprime.

Accepte, tu verras la foi mêlée au crime
Se souiller dans le sang sacré de la raison,
Quand surgit, rédempteur du vieux peuple saxon,
Luther à Wittenberg comme Christ à Solime

Jamais de la cité le mal entier ne fuit,
Hélas ! et son autel y fume dans la nuit ;
Mais notre âge a ceci de pareil à l'aurore,

Que c'est un divin cri du chanteur éternel,
Le tien, qui pour forcer le jour tardif d'éclore
Déchire avec splendeur le voile épars du ciel.

CHAP. XI

AND so it was that I came to settle down in a Strand lodging-house, prepared to accept the hardships of a literary life, convinced that play-time was over, and anxious for proof (peremptory proof) of my capacity or incapacity. A book ! No. An immediate answer was required : journalism could

give it ; therefore to journalism I would go. So did I try to come to terms with myself in the Strand lodging-house. But what led me to that house ? Chance, or a friend's recommendation ? It was uncomfortable, ugly, and not very clean ; but curious, as all things are curious when examined closely. Let me tell about my rooms. The sitting-room, a good deal longer than it was wide, was panelled with deal, and the deal was painted a light brown ; behind it there was a large bedroom, and a big bed stood in the middle of the floor. Next to the sitting-room was a small bedroom which was let for ten shillings a week ; and the partition wall was so thin that I could hear every movement, and this nearness proved so intolerable that I eventually decided to add ten shillings to my rent and possess myself of the entire flat. In the room above me a pretty young woman lived, an actress at the Savoy Theatre. She had a piano, and she used to play and sing in the mornings, and in the afternoon, friends—girls from the theatre—used to come and see her ; and Emma, the maid-of-all-work, used to take them up their tea ; and, oh ! the chattering and the laughter. Poor Miss L—— ; she had only two pounds a week to live on, but she was always in high spirits except when she could not pay the hire of her piano ; and I am sure that she now looks back with pleasure and thinks of those days as very happy ones.

She was a tall girl, with a thin figure, and her eyes were large and brown—a Jewess who liked young men, and hoped that Mr. Gilbert would give her a line or two in his next opera. On her return from the theatre we used to sit on the stairs talking, long after midnight, of what ?—of our landlady, of the theatre, of the most suitable ways of enjoying ourselves in life. One night she told me she was married ; and in a sympathetic voice I asked why she was not living with her husband, and heard the reasons of the separation ; valid reasons enough, forgotten, however, lost in the many similar reasons for separations and partings which have since been confided to me. The landlady resented our intimacy, and I believe

Miss L—— was charged indirectly for her conversations with me in the bill.

On the first floor there was a large sitting-room and bedroom, solitary rooms nearly always unlet. The landlady's parlour was on the ground floor, with her bedroom next to it, and farther on was the entrance to the kitchen stairs, whence ascended Mrs. S——'s brood of children and many various smells, that of ham and eggs predominating.

Emma, I remember you—you are not to be forgotten—up at five o'clock every morning, scouring, washing, cooking, dressing the children; seventeen hours at least out of the twenty-four at the beck and call of landlady and lodgers; seventeen hours at least out of the twenty-four drudging in and out of the kitchen, running upstairs with coals and breakfasts and cans of hot water, or down on your knees before a grate, pulling out the cinders with those hands—can I call them hands? The lodgers sometimes threw you a kind word, but never one that recognized you as of our kin, only the pity that might be extended to a dog.

I used to ask you all sorts of cruel questions; I was curious to know the depth of animalism you had sunk to, or rather out of which you had never been raised. And generally you answered innocently and naïvely enough. But sometimes my words were too crude, and they struck through the thick hide into the quick, into the human, and you winced a little; but this was rarely, for you were very nearly, oh, very nearly an animal, your temperament and intelligence were just those of a dog that has picked up a master, not a real master, but a makeshift master who may turn it out at any moment. Dickens would sentimentalize or laugh over you; I do neither, but recognize you as one of the facts of civilization. You looked—well, to be candid, you looked neither young nor old; hard work had obliterated the delicate markings of the years, and left you in round numbers something over thirty. Your hair was reddish-brown, and your face wore that plain honest look that is so essentially English. The rest of you was a mass of

stuffy clothes, and when you rushed upstairs I saw something that did not look like legs ; a horrible rush that was of yours, a sort of carthorse-like bound. I have spoken angrily to you ; I have heard others speak angrily to you, but never did that sweet face of yours, for it was a sweet face—that sweet, natural goodness that is so sublime—lose its expression of perfect and unfailing kindness. Words convey little sense of the real horrors of the reality. Life in your case meant this : to be born in a slum, and to leave it to work seventeen hours a day in a lodging-house ; to be a Londoner, but to know only the slum in which you were born and the few shops in the Strand at which the landlady dealt. To know nothing of London meant in your case not to know that it was not England ; England and London ! you could not distinguish between them. Was England an island or a mountain ? you had no notion. I remember when you heard that Miss L—— was going to America, you asked me, and the question was sublime : "Is she going to travel all night ?" You had heard people speak of travelling all night, and that was all you knew of travel or any place that was not the Strand. I asked you if you went to church, and you said, "No, it makes my eyes bad." I said, "But you don't read ; you can't read." "No, but I have to look at the book." I asked you if you had heard of God—you hadn't, but when I pressed you on the point you suspected I was laughing at you, and you would not answer, and when I tried you again on the subject I could see that the landlady had been telling you what to say. But you had not understood, and your conscious ignorance, grown conscious within the last couple of days, was even more pitiful than your unconscious ignorance when you answered that you couldn't go to church because it made your eyes bad. It is a strange thing to know nothing ; for instance, to live in London and to have no notion of the House of Commons, nor indeed of the Queen, except perhaps that she is a rich lady ; the police—yes, you knew what a policeman was because you used to be sent to fetch one to make an organ-man or a Christy minstrel

move on. To know of nothing but a dark kitchen, grates, eggs and bacon, dirty children ; to work seventeen hours a day and to get cheated out of your wages ; to answer, when asked, why you did not get your wages or leave if you weren't paid, that you " didn't know how Mrs. S—— would get on without me."

This woman owed you forty pounds, I think, so I calculated it from what you told me ; and yet you did not like to leave her because you did not know how she would get on without you. Sublime stupidity ! At this point your intelligence stopped. I remember you once spoke of a half-holiday ; I questioned you, and I found your idea of a half-holiday was to take the children for a walk and buy them some sweets. I told my brother of this and he said—Emma out for a half-holiday ! why you might as well give a mule a holiday. The phrase was brutal, but it was admirably descriptive of you. Yes, you are a mule, there is no sense in you ; you are a beast of burden, a drudge too horrible for anything but work ; and I suppose, all things considered, that the fat landlady with a dozen children did well to work you seventeen hours a day, and cheat you out of your miserable wages. You had no friends ; you could not have a friend unless it were some forlorn cat or dog ; but you once spoke to me of your brother, who worked in a potato store, and I was astonished, and I wondered if he were as awful as you. Poor Emma ! I shall never forget your kind heart and your unfailing good humour ; you were born beautifully good as a rose is born with perfect perfume ; you were as unconscious of your goodness as the rose of its perfume. And you were taken by this fat landlady as 'Arry takes a rose and sticks it in his tobacco-reeking coat ; and you will be thrown away, shut out of doors when health fails you, or when, overcome by base usage, you take to drink. There is no hope for you ; even if you were treated better and paid your wages there would be no hope. Those forty pounds even, if they were given to you, would bring you no good fortune. They would bring the idle loafer, who scorns you now as something too low for even his kisses, hanging about

your heels and whispering in your ears. And his whispering would drive you mad, for your kind heart longs for kind words ; and then when he had spent your money and cast you off in despair, the gin shop and the river would do the rest. Providence is very wise after all, and your best destiny is your present one. We cannot add a pain, nor can we take away a pain ; we may alter, but we cannot subtract nor even alleviate. But what truisms are these ; who believes in philanthropy nowadays ?

"Come in."

"Oh, it is you, Emma !"

"Are you going to dine at home to-day, sir ?"

"What can I have ?"

"Well, yer can 'ave a chop or a steak."

"Anything else ?"

"Yes, yer can 'ave a steak, or a chop, or——"

"Oh, yes, I know ; well, then, I'll have a chop. And now tell me, Emma, how is your young man ? I hear you have got one, you went out with him the other night."

"Who told yer that ?"

"Ah never mind ; I hear everything."

"I know, from Miss L——"

"Well, tell me, how did you meet him, who introduced him ?"

"I met 'im as I was a'coming from the public-'ouse with the beer for missus' dinner."

"And what did he say ?"

"He asked me if I was engaged ; I said no And he come round down the lane that evening."

"And he took you out ?"

"Yes."

"And where did you go ?"

"We went for a walk on the Embankment."

"And when is he coming for you again ?"

"He said he was coming last evening, but he didn't."

"Why didn't he ?"

"I dunno ; I suppose because I haven't time to go out with him. So it was Miss L—— that told you ; well, you do 'ave chats on the stairs. I suppose you likes talking to 'er."

"I like talking to everybody, Emma ; I like talking to you."

"Yes, but not as you talks to 'er ; I 'ears you jes do 'ave fine times. She said this morning that she had not seen you for this last two nights—that you had forgotten 'er, and I was to tell yer."

"Very well, I'll come out to-night and speak to her."

"And missus is so wild about it, and she daren't say nothing 'cause she thinks yer might go."

A young man in a house full of women must be almost supernaturally unpleasant if he does not occupy a great deal of their attention. Certain at least it is that I was the point of interest in that house ; and I found there that the practice of virtue is not so disagreeable as many young men think it. The fat landlady hovered round my doors, and I obtained perfectly fresh eggs by merely keeping her at a distance ; the pretty actress, with whom I used to sympathize on the stairs at midnight, loved me better, and our intimacy was more strange and subtle, because it was pure, and it was not very unpleasant to know that the servant dreamed of me as she might of a star, or something equally unattainable ; the landlady's daughter, a nasty girl of fifteen, annoyed me with her ogling : the house was not aristocratic, it is true, but, I repeat, it was not unpleasant, nor do I believe that any young man, however refined, would have found it unpleasant.

. . . .

My days in Cecil Street are only a few years behind me, and already I have begun to regret them, or, to speak more

exactly, to regret that chance misfortune did not plunge me deeper into what is known as low life, but which is really the only life. Cecil Street is remembered with a certain pride, for I went there to live on two pounds a week, determined to make my way in literature, for my Irish properties seemed at that time to be vanishing away, and to make one's bread at literature requires hard training, especially in my case, for I could not write printable English at that time—only a jargon that was neither French nor English. It was in that house in Cecil Street that I began "The Modern Lover," and wrote it out in copybooks from daylight till dark, and then went out to learn London, to assimilate, to become part of the vast incoherent mass which is London. To write about London I should have to begin by forgetting Paris, blotting out of my mind the boulevards with their trees and the kiosque. Ah! the kiosque! Nothing is so evocative of Paris as the kiosque. The old women sitting before their trestles covered with newspapers; the men buying and turning into their *café* or sitting down in the chairs under the awning, an absinthe or vermuth in front of them.

These were the scenes that I saw in my mind's eye when I walked out of grubby Cecil Street into the Strand, and turned eastward and mooched about in many various purlieus, wondering at the sordid public-house at the corner. It reminded me how far I was from the Nouvelle Athènes and the Boule Noire. It was the *café* that I missed, the brilliant life of the *café*, the casual life of the *café*, so different from the life of the bars into which I turned in search of a companion and the eating-houses where I fed between seven and eight on roast saddle of mutton, wheeled round the different pens and cut to the liking of the customer, with potatoes and vegetables. "Potatoes and vegetables" was the cry of the second waiter, and often I pondered the phrase. Why "potatoes" and vegetables? Are potatoes not vegetables? Strictly, I suppose they are tubers. These eating-houses were well enough from seven till eight; one met somebody connected

with a newspaper or some shadowy rhymer willing to talk; but after nine o'clock London was a desolate place for me, and I walked thinking of the *cafés* that I had abandoned, and thinking, too, of the Mermaid Tavern in which the Elizabethan poets used to forgather very much as we did in Paris in the Nouvelle Athènes. But London has lost her taverns.

Some seventy years ago the Club superseded the Tavern, and since then all literary intercourse has ceased in London. Literary clubs have been founded, and their leather armchairs have begotten Mr. Gosse; but the tavern gave the world Villon and Marlowe. Nor is this to be wondered at. What is wanted is enthusiasm and devil-may-careism; and the very aspect of a tavern is a snort of defiance at the heath, but the leather armchairs are so many salaams to it. I ask, Did anyone ever see a gay club-room? Can anyone imagine such a thing? You can't have a club-room without mahogany tables, you can't have mahogany tables without magazines—*Longman's*, with a serial by Rider Haggard, the *Nineteenth Century*, with an article, "The Rehabilitation of the Pimp in Modern Society," by W. E. Gladstone—a dullness that's a purge to good spirits, an aperient to enthusiasm; in a word, a dullness that's worth a thousand a year. You can't have a club without a waiter in red plush and silver salver in his hand; then you can't bring a lady to a club, and you have to get into a corner to talk about them. Therefore I say a club is dull.

As the hearth and home grew all-powerful it became impossible for the husband to tell his wife that he was going to the tavern; everyone can go to the tavern, and no place is considered respectable where everyone can go.

The genesis of the Club is out of the Housewife by Respectability.

Nowadays everyone is respectable—jockeys, betting men, actors, and even actresses. Mrs. Kendal takes her children to visit a duchess, and has naughty chorus girls to tea, and tells them of the joy of respectability. Only one class left unrespectable, and that one will succumb before long; how the

transformation will be effected I can't say, but I know an editor or two who would be glad of an article on the subject.

Respectability !—a suburban villa, a piano in the drawing-room, and going home to dinner. Such things are no doubt very excellent, but they do not promote intensity of feeling, fervour of mind ; and as art is in itself an outcry against the animality of human existence, it would be well that the life of the artist should be a practical protest against the so-called decencies of life ; and he can best protest by frequenting a tavern and cutting his club. In the past the artist has always been an outcast ; it is only latterly he has become domesticated, and judging by results, it is clear that if Bohemianism is not a necessity it is at least an adjuvant. For if long locks and general dissoluteness were not an aid and a way to pure thought, why have they been so long his characteristics ? If lovers were not necessary for the development of poet, novelist, and actress, why have they always had lovers —Sappho, George Eliot, George Sand, Rachel, Sara ? But good Mrs. Kendal suckles her child by day and plays Rosalind at night. Truly a ridiculous endeavour ! for to realize the transformation, a woman must have sinned ; only through sin may we learn the charm of innocence. A woman must have had more than one lover to play Rosalind, and if she has been made to wait in the rain and been beaten she will have suffered enough, and through suffering qualified herself for the part. Sara makes no pretence to virtue, but she introduces her son to an English duchess, and throws over a nation for the love of Richepin. She can, therefore, say as none other—

" C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée."

Swinburne, when he dodged about London, a lively young dog, wrote " Poems and Ballads " and " Chastelard " ; since he has gone to live at Putney, he has contributed to the *Nineteenth Century*, and published an interesting little volume entitled, " A Century of Rondels," in which he continued his plaint about his mother the sea.

Respectability is sweeping the picturesque out of life; national costumes are disappearing. The kilt is going or gone in the highlands, and the smock in the southlands, even the Japanese are becoming Christian and respectable; in another quarter of a century silk hats and pianos will be found in every house in Yeddo. Too true that universal uniformity is the future of the world; and when Mr. Morris speaks of the democratic art to be when the world is socialistic, I ask, whence will the unfortunates draw their inspiration? To-day our plight is pitiable enough—the duke, the jockey-boy, and the artist are exactly alike; they are dressed by the same tailor, they dine at the same clubs, they swear the same oaths, they speak equally bad English, they love the same women. Such a state of things is dreary enough, but what unimaginable dreariness there will be when there are neither rich nor poor, when all have been educated, when self-education has ceased. A terrible world to dream of, worse, far worse, in darkness and hopelessness than Dante's lowest circle of hell. The spectres of famine, of the plague, of war, etc., are mild and gracious symbols compared with that menacing figure, Universal Education, with which we are threatened, which has already eunuched the genius of the last five-and-twenty years of the nineteenth century, and produced a limitless abortion in that of future time. Education, I tremble before thy dreaded name. The cruelties of Nero, of Caligula, what were they?—a few crunched limbs in the amphitheatre; but thine, O Education, are the yearning of souls sick of life, maddening discontent, all the fearsome and fathomless sufferings of the mind. When Goethe said "More light," he said the wickedest and most infamous words that human lips ever spoke. In old days, when a people became too highly civilized the barbarians came down from the north and regenerated that nation with darkness; but now there are no more barbarians, and sooner or later I am convinced that we shall have to end the evil by summary edicts—the obstruction no doubt will be severe, the equivalents of Gladstone and

Morley will stop at nothing to defeat the bill; but it will nevertheless be carried by patriotic Conservative and Unionist majorities, and it will be written in the Statue Book that no more than one child in a hundred shall be taught to read, and no more than one in ten thousand shall learn the piano.

Such will be the end of Respectability, but the end is still far distant. We are now in a period of decadence growing steadily more and more acute. The old gods are falling about us, there is little left to raise our hearts and minds to, and amid the wreck and ruin of things only a snobbery is left to us, thank heaven, deeply graven in the English heart; the snob is now the ark that floats triumphant over the democratic wave; the faith of the old world reposes in his breast, and he shall proclaim it when the waters have subsided.

In the meanwhile Respectability, having destroyed the Tavern, and created the Club, continues to exercise a meretricious and enervating influence on literature. All audacity of thought and expression has been stamped out, and the conventionalities are rigorously respected. It has been said a thousand times that an art is only a reflection of a certain age; quite so, only certain ages are more interesting than others, and consequently produce better art, just as certain seasons produce better crops. We heard in the Nouvelle Athènes how the Democratic movement, in other words, Respectability, in other words, Education, has extinguished the handicrafts; it was admitted that in the more individual arts—painting and poetry—men would be always found to sacrifice their lives for a picture or a poem: but no man is, after all, so immeasurably superior to the age he lives in as to be able to resist it wholly; he must draw sustenance from some quarter, and the contemplation of the past will not suffice. The pressure on him from without is as water upon the diver; and sooner or later he grows fatigued and comes to the surface to breathe; he is as a flying-fish pursued by sharks below and birds above; and he neither dives as deep nor flies as high as his freer and stronger ancestry. A daring spirit in the

nineteenth century would have been but a timid nursery soul indeed in the sixteenth. We want tumult and war to give us forgetfulness, sublime moments of peace to enjoy a kiss in; but we are expected to be home to dinner at seven, and to say and do nothing that might shock the neighbours. Respectability has wound itself about society, a sort of octopus, and nowhere are you quite free from one of its suckers. The power of the villa residence is great: art, science, politics, religion, it has transformed to suit its requirements. The villa goes to the Academy, the villa goes to the theatre, and therefore the art of to-day is mildly realistic; not the great realism of idea, but the puny reality of materialism; not the deep poetry of a Pieter de Hooch, but the meanness of a Frith—not the winged realism of Balzac, but the degrading naturalism of a coloured photograph.

There is no sadder spectacle of artistic decadence than a London theatre; the overfed inhabitants of the villa in the stalls hoping for gross excitement to assist them through their hesitating digestions; an ignorant mob in the pit and gallery forgetting the miseries of life in imbecile stories reeking of the sentimentality of the back stairs. Were other ages as coarse and common as ours? It is difficult to imagine Elizabethan audiences as not more intelligent than those that applaud Mr. Pettit's plays; and we find it hard indeed to believe that an audience that could sit out "Edward II," could find any pleasure in such literary infamy as "In the Ranks" and "Harbour Lights." Artistic atrophy is benumbing us, we are losing our finer feeling for beauty, the rose is going back to the briar. I will not speak of the fine old crusted stories, ever the same, on which every drama is based, nor yet of the musty characters with which they are peopled—the miser in the old castle counting his gold by night, the dishevelled woman whom he keeps for ambiguous reasons confined in a cellar. Let all this be waived. We must not quarrel with the ingredients. The miser and the old castle are as true, and not one jot more true, than the million events which go to make up

the spectacle of human existence. Not at these things considered separately do I take umbrage, but at the miserable use that is made of them, the vulgarity of the complications evolved from them, and the poverty of beauty in the dialogue.

Not the thing itself, but the idea of the thing evokes the idea. Schopenhauer was right; we do not want the thing, but the idea of the thing. The thing itself is worthless; and the moral writers who embellish it with pious ornamentation are just as reprehensible as Zola, who embellishes it with erotic arabesques. We want the idea drawn out of obscuring matter, and this can best be done by the symbol. The symbol, or the thing itself, that is the great artistic question. In earlier ages it was the symbol; a name, a plume, sufficed to evoke the idea; now we evoke nothing, for we give everything, the imagination of the spectator is no longer called into play. In Shakespeare's days to create wealth in a theatre it was only necessary to write upon a board, "A magnificent apartment in a palace." This was no doubt primitive and not a little barbarous, but it was better by far than by dint of anxious archæology to construct the Doge's palace upon the stage. By one rich pillar, by some projecting balustrade taken in conjunction with a moored gondola, we should strive to evoke the soul of the city of Veronese: by the magical and unequalled selection of a subtle and unexpected feature of a thought or aspect of a landscape, and not by the up-piling of extraneous detail, are all great poetic effects achieved.

"By the tideless dolorous midland sea,
In a land of sand and ruin and gold."

And, better example still,

"Dieu que le son du cor est triste au fond des bois,"

that impeccable, that only line of real poetry Alfred de Vigny ever wrote. Being a great poet Shakespeare consciously or unconsciously observed more faithfully than any other poet these principles of art; and, as is characteristic of the present

day, nowhere do we find these principles so grossly violated as in the representation of his plays. I had proof of this some few nights after my arrival in London. I had never seen Shakespeare acted, and I went to the Lyceum and there I saw that exquisite love-song—for *Romeo and Juliet* is no more than a love-song in dialogue—tricked out in silks and carpets and illuminated buildings, a vulgar bawd suited to the gross passion of an ignorant public; and hating it all, I longed for a few scenical indications, and the recitation of the two white souls sacrificed for the reconciliation of two great families. My hatred did not reach to the age of the man who played the boy-lover, but was concerned only with the offensiveness with which he thrust his individuality upon me, prone to realize the poet's divine imagination. The woman, too, I wished with my whole soul away, subtle and strange though she was; and I yearned for the youth as of old time in the part: a youth cunningly disguised, I said, would be a symbol; and my mind would be free to imagine the divine Juliet of the poet, whereas I can but dream of the bright eyes and delicate mien and motion of the woman who had thrust herself between me and it.

But not with symbol and subtle suggestion has the villa to do, but with such stolid intellectual fare as corresponds to its material wants. The villa has not time to think, the villa is the working bee. The tavern is the drone. It has no boys to put to school, no neighbours to study, and is therefore a little more refined—or should I say depraved?—in its taste. The villa in one form or other has always existed, and always will exist so long as our present social system holds together. It is the basis of life, and more important than the tavern. Agreed: but does that mean that the tavern should be abolished? The tavern is an excellent corrective influence to the villa, and its disappearance has had a vulgarizing effect on artistic work of all kinds; the club cannot replace the tavern: the club is no more than the correlative of the villa; and that much being granted to me, I will pass on to the circulating library, at once the symbol and glory of villaism.

The subject is not unfamiliar to me ; I come to it like the son to his father, like the bird to its nest. (Singularly inappropriate comparison, but I am in such excellent humour to-day ; a man's humour is half the game. It is said that the tiger will sometimes play with the lamb ! Let us play.) We have the villa well in our mind. The father who goes to the city in the morning, the grown-up girls waiting to be married, the big drawing-room where they play waltz music, and talk of dancing-parties. But waltzes will not entirely suffice, nor even tennis ; the girls must read. Mother cannot keep a censor (it is as much as she can do to keep a cook, housemaid and page-boy), besides the expense would be enormous, even if nothing but shilling and two-shilling novels were purchased. Out of such circumstances the circulating library was hatched.

The villa made known its want, and art fell on its knees. Pressure was put on the publishers ; books were published at 31s. 6d. ; the villa paid its yearly subscription, and had nice large handsome books that none but the élite could obtain, and with them a sense of being put on a footing of equality with my Lady This and Lady That, and certainty that nothing would come into the hands of dear Kate and Mary and Maggie that they might not read, and all for two guineas a year. English fiction became pure, and the garlic and asafœtida with which Byron, Fielding and Ben Jonson so liberally seasoned their works, and in spite of which, as critics say, they were geniuses, have disappeared from our literature. English fiction became pure, smutty stories were to be heard no more, were no longer procurable. But at this point human nature intervened ; poor human nature ! when you pinch it in one place it bulges out in another, after the fashion of a lady's finger. Human nature has from the earliest time shown a liking for smutty stories ; smutty stories have formed a substantial part of every literature. Call it a disease if you will—an incurable disease—which, if it is driven inwards, will break out in an unexpected quarter in a new

form and with redoubled virulence. This is exactly what has happened. Actuated by the most laudable motives, Mudie cut off our rations of stories, and for forty years we were apparently the most moral people on the face of the earth. It was confidently asserted that an English woman of sixty would not read what would bring the blush of shame to the cheeks of a maiden of any other nation. But humiliation and sorrow were awaiting Mudie. True it is that we still continued to subscribe to his library, true it is that we still continued to go to church, true it is that we turned our faces away when "Mlle. de Maupin" or the "Assommoir" was spoken of; to all appearance we were as good and chaste as even Mudie might wish us; and no doubt he looked back upon his forty years of effort with pride; no doubt he beat his manly breast and said, "I have scorched the evil one out of the villa; the head of the serpent is crushed for evermore"; but lo! suddenly, with all the horror of an earthquake, the slumbrous law courts awoke, and the burning cinders of fornication and the blinding and suffocating smoke of adultery were poured upon and hung over the land. Through the mighty columns of our newspapers the terrible lava rolled unceasing, and in the black stream the villa, with all its beautiful illusions, tumbled and disappeared.

It is strange that it should have come into anybody's head to think that our morality is dependent upon the books we read, and we begin to wonder how it is that Nature should have implanted so strange an idea into our minds rather than in the mind of some other race. But there it is, a perennial in the Anglo-Saxon mind, bursting into bloom at unexpected intervals, out of sheer lightheartedness, it would seem, for even the little children in the streets must know by this time that the morality of the world will always be the same, despite good and bad books. A strange belief it is, truly, that our morality depends upon the books we read, especially modern books, and harmful in more ways than one; for without it the three-volume system would secure a certain market to

the writer for his first work and give him valuable leisure to consider and revise his subsequent works. But all the advantages that literature might have derived from the circulating libraries have been frittered away by a vain and vexatious censorship.

There is one thing in England that reminds me of the blithe humanities of the Continent, yet it is wholly and essentially English; its communal enjoyment and its spontaneity sets us thinking of Elizabethan England—I mean the music-hall; the French music-hall lacks the vulgarity of the English hall—not the Pavillon, that is too cosmopolitan (dreary French comics are heard there)—let us say the Royal. I shall not easily forget my first evening at the Royal, when I saw for the time a living house—the dissolute paragraphists, the elegant mashers (mark the imaginativeness of the slang), the stolid, good-humoured costers, the cheerful lights o' love, the extraordinary comics. What delightful unison of enjoyment, what unanimity of soul, what communality of wit; all knew each other, all enjoyed each other's presence; in a word, there was life. Then there were no cascades of real water, nor London docks, nor offensively rich furniture, with hotel lifts down which somebody will certainly be thrown, but one scene representing a street; a man comes on—not, mind you, in a real smock-frock, but in something that suggests one—and sings of how he came up to London, and was "cleaned out" by thieves. Simple, you will say; yes, but better than a *fricassée* of "Faust," garnished with hags, imps, and blue flame; better, far better than a drawing-room set at the St. James's, with an exhibition of passion by Mrs. and Mr. Kendal; better, a million times better than the cheap popularity of Wilson Barrett—an elderly man posturing in a low-necked dress to some poor trull in the gallery; nor is there in the hall any affectation of language, nor that worn-out rhetoric which reminds us of a broken-winded barrel-organ

playing *Ah! che la morte*, bad enough in prose, but when set up in blank verse shocking in its more than natural deformity —but bright quips and cranks fresh from the back yard of the slum where the linen is drying, or the "pub" where the unfortunate wife has just received a black eye that will last her a week. That inimitable artist, Bessie Bellwood, whose native wit is so curiously accentuated that it is no longer repellent vulgarity but art, choice and rare—see, here she comes with "What cheer, Rea! Rea's on the job." The sketch is slight, but is welcome and refreshing after the eternal drawing-room and Mrs. Kendal's cumbrous domesticity; it is curious, quaint, perverted, and are not these the *aions* and the attributes of art? Now see that perfect comedian, Arthur Roberts, superior to Irving because he is working with living material; how trim and saucy he is! and how he evokes the soul, the brandy-and-soda soul, of the young men, delightful and elegant in black and white, who are so vociferously cheering him, "Will you stand me a cab-fare, ducky, I am feeling so awfully queer?" The soul, the spirit, the entity of Piccadilly Circus is in the words, and the scene the comedian's eyes—each look is full of suggestion; it is irritating, it is magnetic, it is symbolic, it is art.

Not art, but a sign, a presentiment of an art, that may grow from the present seeds, that may rise into some stately and unpremeditated efflorescence, as the rhapodist rose to Sophocles, as the miracle play rose through Peele and Nash to Marlowe, hence to the wondrous summer of Shakespeare, to die later on in the mist and yellow and brown of the autumn of Crowes and Davenants. I have seen music-hall sketches, comic interludes that in their unexpectedness and naïve naturalness remind me of the comic passages in Marlowe's "Faustus," I waited (I admit in vain) for some beautiful phantom to appear, and to hear an enthusiastic worshipper cry out in his agony :—

> "Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul; see, where it flies!
Come, Helen, come; give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena."

And then the astonishing change of key:—

" I will be Paris, and for love of thee,
Instead of Troy shall Wittenberg be sacked," etc.

The hall is at least a protest against the wearisome stories concerning wills, misers in old castles, lost heirs, and the woeful solutions of such things—she who has been kept in the castle cellar for twenty years restored to the delights of hair-pins and a mauve dress, the *ingénue* to the protecting arm, etc. The music-hall is a protest against Mrs. Kendal's marital tenderness and the abortive platitudes of Messrs. Pettit and Sims; the music-hall is a protest against Sardou and the immense drawing-room sets, rich hangings, velvet sofas, etc., so different from the movement of the English comedy with its constant change of scene. The music-hall is a protest against the villa, the circulating library, the club, and for this the " 'all " is inexpressibly dear to me.

CHAP. XII

THE actress, when she returned home from the theatre, suggested I had an enemy, a vindictive enemy, who dogged my steps; but her stage experience led her astray. I had no enemy except myself; or to put it scientifically, no enemy except the logical consequences of my past life and education, and these caused me a great and real inconvenience. French wit was in my brain, French sentiment was in my heart; of the English soul I knew nothing, and I could not remember old sympathies, it was like seeking forgotten words, and if

I were writing a short story, I had to return in thought to Montmartre or the Champs Elysées for my characters. Some will not be able to believe this because few are aware of how little they know of the details of life, even of their own, and are incapable of appreciating the influence of their past upon their present. The visible world is visible only to a few, the moral world is a closed book to nearly all. I was full of France, and France had to be got rid of, or pushed out of sight, before I could understand England ; I was handicapped with dangerous ideas, and an impossible style, and before long the leading journal, that had printed two poems and some seven or eight critical articles, ceased to send me books for review. I fell back upon obscure society papers. But it was not incumbent on me to live by my pen ; so I talked, and watched, and waited till I grew akin to those around me, and my thoughts blended with, and took root in my environment.

I wrote a play or two, I translated a French opera, which had a run of six nights, I dramatized a novel, I wrote short stories, and I read a good deal of contemporary fiction.

The first book that came under my hand was " A Portrait of a Lady," by Henry James. I will admit that an artist may be great and limited ; by one word he may light up an abyss of soul ; but there must be this one magical and unique word. Shakespeare gives us the word, Balzac, sometimes, after pages of vain striving, gives us the word, Tourgueneff gives it always ; but Henry James only flutters about it ; his whole book is one long flutter near to the one magical and unique word, but the word is not spoken ; and for want of the word his characters are never resolved out of the haze of nebulæ. We are on a bowing acquaintance with them ; they pass us in the street, they stop and speak ; we know how they are dressed, and we watch the colour of their eyes. The crowd of well-dressed people, in " A Portrait of a Lady," comes back to me precisely as an accurate memory of a fashionable soirée—the staircase with its ascending figures, the hostess smiling, the host at a little distance with his back

turned ; someone calls him. He wheels round, and I see his white kid gloves. The air is sugar-sweet with the odour of the gardenias ; there is brilliant light here, there is shadow in the farther rooms, the women's feet pass to and fro beneath the stiff skirts, I call for my hat and coat, I light a cigar, I stroll up Piccadilly . . . saying to myself, " a very pleasant evening, I have seen a good many people I knew, I have observed an attitude, and an earnestness of manner that proved that a heart was beating . . . somewhere."

Mr. James might say, " If I have done this, I have done a great deal," and I would answer, " No doubt you're a man of talent, cultivation, and not at all of the common herd, and to please you I'll place you in the very front rank, not only of novelists but of men of letters." But a man of genius, oh, no !

I've read nothing of Henry James's that didn't suggest a scholar ; so there shall be none of the old taunts—why does he not write complicated stories ? Why does he always avoid decisive action ? In his stories a woman never leaves the house with her lover, nor does a man ever kill another man or himself. Why is nothing ever accomplished ? In real life murder, adultery, and suicide are of common occurrence ; but Mr. James's people live in a calm, sad, and very polite twilight of volition. Suicide or adultery has happened before the story begins, suicide or adultery happens some years after the characters have left the stage, but in front of the reader nothing happens. The suppression or maintenance of story in a novel is a matter of personal taste ; some prefer character-drawing to adventures, some adventures to character-drawing ; that we cannot have both at once I take to be a self-evident proposition ; so when Mr. Lang says, " I like adventures," I say, " Oh, do you ?" as I might to a man who says " I like sherry," and no doubt when I say I like character-drawing, Mr. Lang says, " Oh, do you ?" as he might to a man who says, " I like port."

But Mr. James and I are agreed on essentials ; we are

more interested in human portraiture than with searches made for buried treasure according to scripts left behind by ancient mariners. But for human portraiture models are necessary, and the drawing-room presents few accents and angles, conformity to its prejudices and conventions having worn all away. Ladies and gentlemen are as round as the pebbles on the beach, presenting only smooth surfaces. Is there really much to say about people who live in stately houses and eat and drink their fill every day of the year? The lad, it is true, may have a lover, but the pen finds scanty pasturage in the fact; and in James's novels the lady only considers the question on the last page, and the gentleman looks at her questioningly.

In connection with Henry James the name of W. D. Howells is often mentioned, and I bought some three or four of his novels and finding them overflowing with girls in white dresses, languid mammas, mild witticisms, and young men, some cynical, some a little over-shadowed by love (in a word, a Tom Robertson comedy faintly spiced with American), I said: "Henry James went to France and read Tourgueneff. W. D. Howells stayed at home and read Henry James."

Henry James's mind is of a higher cast and temper; I have no doubt at one time of his life Henry James said, I will write the moral history of America, as Tourgueneff wrote the moral history of Russia—he borrowed at first hand, understanding what he was borrowing. W. D. Howells borrowed at second hand, and without understanding what he was borrowing. Altogether Mr. James's instincts are more scholarly, and I often regret his concessions to the prudery of the age, and cannot but feel that his concessions, for I suppose I must call them concessions, are to a certain extent self-imposed. He would answer me somewhat in this fashion —regretfully, perhaps: "It is true that I live in an age not very favourable to artistic production, but the art of an age is the spirit of that age; if I violate the prejudices of the age I shall miss its spirit, and an art that is not redolent of the

spirit of its age is an artificial flower, perfumeless, or perfumed with the scent of flowers that bloomed three hundred years ago."

To carry the analysis one step further, we will answer the apology that we conceive Mr. James would make to us were we to address him in a question of this sort: "Why don't you turn your hand to a girl who gets thirty shillings a week and thinks she would be very happy if she could get thirty-five?" "The woman of leisure," he would answer, "lives in a deeper intellectual mood than the work-girl whose ambition is an extra five shillings a week." The interviewer in us would like to ask Henry James why he never married; but it would be vain to ask, so much does he write like a man to whom all action is repugnant. He confesses himself on every page, as we all do. On every page James is a prude and Howells is the happy father of a numerous family; the sun is shining, the girls and boys are playing on the lawn, they come trooping in to high tea, and there is dancing in the evening.

It was about this time that my landlady lent me George Meredith's "Tragic Comedians," and after reading a few pages I fell to wondering how she had become possessed of the volume, and if it were true that she had enjoyed reading it; a sufficient matter for my wonderment surely, for myself, whom I supposed to be more literary than the landlady, was not able to come to any sort of terms with the book: or could it be that she had been told that George Meredith was "the thing" to admire by some lodger that had taken her fancy? Her admiration of the book I felt to be derivative, and this opinion was enforced by the discovery that she had not read any other book by George Meredith, and did not know that he was primarily a poet. She had never heard of "Love in a Valley" nor the "Nuptials of Attila," and I mentioned to her the lordly refrain—"Make the bed for Attila," forgetful for the moment that she sometimes made my bed.

In Balzac, that I know by heart, in Shakespeare, that

I have just begun to love, there are phrases deeply impregnated with the savour of life; but in George Meredith only sterile nuts, phrases that people call epigrams, and it is impossible for me to call to mind a book more like a cockatoo than "The Tragic Comedians"; it struts and screams just like one; but in "Rhoda Fleming" there is some wit. One, Antony by name, describes how he is interrupted at his tea in a paragraph of seven or ten lines with "I am having my tea, I am at my tea," running through it for refrain. Then a description of a lodging-house dinner: "a block of bread on a lonely place, and potatoes that looked as if they had committed suicide in their own steam." A little ponderous and stilted, but withal good, and I read on until I came to a young man who fell from his horse, or had been thrown from his horse, I never knew which, nor did I feel enough interest in the matter to make research; the young man was put to bed by his mother, and once in bed he began to talk! . . . four, five, six, ten pages of talk, arid and useless, surprisingly commonplace.

"Diana of the Crossways" I liked better, and were there nothing to do I might have crawled through it. A scene with a rustic amused me—a rustic who could eat 'og a solid hour—and there is an excellent sloppy road with vague outlines of the South Downs seen in starlight and mist. But when we look round for a human being we see and hear none: Diana has faded in starlight and mist, and it is by the power to call souls out of the abyss into life that time judges us. If this page comes under the eyes of a reader of Tourgueneff, he will remember the unveiling of the woman's affections for Bazaroff, and the relation at the same time of the reasons why she will never marry him. . . . I wish I had the book by me; I have not seen it for ten years.

My memory of Balzac must help me now. After striving through many pages to describe Lucien, he allows Lucien to create himself. In answer to an impatient question by Vautrin, who asks him what he wants, what he is sighing for,

Lucien answers, "*D'être célèbre et d'être aimé.*" On these words, and not before, he starts into being. The tale-teller creates easily, if he create. Tourgueneff is never at pains to tell us that this woman is good and that woman bad; his women are good or bad; but Meredith insists—insistence conveys no idea of his style; he puts a trumpet to his lips and yells that Diana is beautiful, divine; that she is brilliant, that her conversation is like a display of fireworks, and that the company is dazzled and overcome.

"When we have translated half of Mr. Meredith's utterances into possible human speech, then we can enjoy him," says the *Pall Mall Gazette.* We take our pleasures differently; mine are spontaneous, and I know nothing about translating the rank smell of a nettle into the fragrance of a rose, and then enjoying it.

He puts on his style so thickly that we can barely see his people, and have to peer through the dazzling page to catch sight of them. They seem to be doing a great deal, but in truth the most that can be said is that they are dancing to literary rhythms—a thing which, however, cannot be said of any other novelist. His habit is not slattern; there is no trace of the crowd about him; he is one whose love of art is pure and untainted with commercialism, and if I may praise it for nought else, I can praise it for this.

I have noticed that if I buy a book because I am advised, or because I think I ought, my reading is sure to prove sterile. A quotation, a chance word heard in an unexpected quarter, puts me on the trail of the book destined to achieve some intellectual advancement in me, and I read Mr. Hardy, despite his name. It prejudiced me against him from the first; a name so trivial as Thomas Hardy cannot, I said, foreshadow a great talent; and "Far from the Madding Crowd" discovered the fact to me that Mr. Hardy was but one of George Eliot's miscarriages.

The critic is no doubt right when he insists on the difficulty of telling a story. A sequence of events—it does not matter

how simple or how complicated—working up to a logical close, or shall I say, a close in which there is a sense of rhythm and inevitableness, is always indicative of genius. Shakespeare affords some fine examples, likewise Balzac, likewise Tourgueneff; the "Œdipus" is, of course, the crowning and final achievement in the music of sequence and the massy harmonies of fate. But in contemporary English fiction I am often struck by the inability of writers, even of the first class, to make an organic whole of their stories. Here, I say, the course is clear, the way is obvious, but no sooner do we enter on the last chapters than the story begins to show incipient shiftiness, and soon it doubles back and turns, growing with every turn weaker like a hare before the hounds. The opening chapters of "Far from the Madding Crowd" promised well, and there was no reason to suspect that the story would run hare-hearted in its close, but the moment Troy told his wife that he never cared for her, I knew something was wrong; when he went down to bathe and was carried out by the current I said "the game was up," and was prepared for anything, even for the final shooting by the rich farmer, and the marriage with Oak, a conclusion which of course does not come within the range of literary criticism.

"Lorna Doone" struck me as childishly garrulous, stupidly prolix, swollen with comments not interesting in themselves and leading to nothing. Mr. Hardy starts out with an idea, and it is a pity that he cannot mould his idea, shape it, breathe into it the breath of life; but he is better than Mr. Blackmore, who seems just to have happened once on a subject that interested people at the time; and if I speak of these writers, who certainly are inferior, it is because they are links in the chain whereby I returned from French into English literature, and having to speak of them, I relate my impressions.

The reading of "Lorna Doone" calls to my mind, and very vividly, an original artistic principle of which English romance writers are either strangely ignorant or neglectful, viz., that the sublimation of the *dramatis personæ* and the deeds in which

they are involved must correspond, and their relationship should remain unimpaired. Turner's " Carthage " is Nature transposed and modified. Some of the passages of light and shade—those of the balustrade—are fugues, and there his art is allied to Bach in sonority and beautiful combination. Turner knew that a branch hung across the sun looked at separately was black, but he painted it light to maintain the equipoise of atmosphere. In the novel the characters are the voice, the deeds are the orchestra. But the English novelist takes 'Arry and 'Arriet, and allows them to achieve deeds manifestly above their stature, thereby violating first principles. The deed should always be a symbol of the man, and in the elder writers the man and the deed are cognate and co-equal. Achilles stands as tall as Troy. Helen represents every man's desire, old or young, and it is this sense, shall I say, of the chord, that separates Homer from the fabricators of singular adventures. And it is this sense of harmony that separates us from circulating literature ; our melody may lay itself open to criticism, but the chord is beautiful always. Even poor old Scott was not without some sense of—" Without some sense of what ?" I asked myself, rousing suddenly from my meditation. Who was talking of Scott ? I answer myself that Scott was succeeded by Lytton, and that a professor of literature would know enough about Landor to enable him to speak of stiff brocades, woven in Athens, somebody has written that, somebody must have written that, and I fall to dreaming of the great and beautiful men and women (exalted melodies) that rise out of Landor's pages—a writer as great as Shakespeare, surely ? The last heir of a noble family. All that follows Landor is decadent—an admixture of romance and realism, the exaggerations of Hugo and the homeliness of Trollope ; a litter of ancient elements in a state of decomposition.

The spiritual analysis of Balzac equals Shakespeare's evocations ; by different roads they reach the same height of tragic awe, but when improbability, which in these days

does duty for imagination, is mixed with the familiar aspects of life—I mean the combination of Ma and Pa and dear Annie who live in Clapham, with the mountains of the moon and the secret of eternal life—the result is art for the villa. The villa must take part in the heroic deeds that fall out in the mountains of the moon; it will have heroism in its own teapot, and Achilles and Merlin must be replaced by Uncle Jim and an undergraduate. The Villa is the only begotten of Rider Haggard, Hugh Conway, Robert Buchanan, and the author of "The House on the Marsh."

In this wise I used to talk in the Gaiety bar to the great amazement of its literati, always conscious that David Christie Murray, Byron Webber, and Richard Dowling were poor substitutes for Manet, Degas, Pissarro, Renoir, Cabaner, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Catulle Mendès, and Duranty. But so long as men talked about art, I did not mind very much how they talked. That they were willing to listen was enough, and in pursuit of English literature I read what they wrote—"Joseph's Coat," by David Christie Murray; "In Luck's Way," by Byron Webber; and a Celtic romance, the name of which I have forgotten, by Richard Dowling.

These men used to arrive at the Gaiety bar about four o'clock, and at five the bar was in session, deference being paid to David Christie Murray, a clear-eyed, tall, blunt Northerner whose resonant voice bespoke his success with publishers. Byron Webber, the editor of a "weekly," a thick-set man, waddled into the bar with a black bag in his hand, and a red flush in the small portion of his face that was not covered with a black beard. His first question was, if Murray had concluded the arrangements with Chatto and Windus to write the serial for *Belgravia*. Murray answered that he had. Soon after Richard Dowling entered, a tall Irishman of flabby face and hands, without distinctive feature except, perhaps, weak eyes. His voice, too, was weak and pathetic from disappointment; for he had once imagined himself on the threshold of success, and now he spoke only of

having been quill-driving all day, trying to earn food for the little family he had brought over from Waterford.

At half past five we were all sitting in the semicircular nooks under the cathedral windows, and at six, Tinsley, the publisher from Catherine Street, would come in, room being made for him instantly. He used to carry a bag containing fish for the family and a manuscript novel; and until seven whisky was drunk, and before dinner-time somebody was gleefully drunk, and a scowl began to appear on my face, for I was always annoyed by drunkenness. But there was nowhere else I could talk literature, and it was essential to drive the French language and French ideas out of my mind; till that was done a novel of English life could not be written. The Gaiety bar could do this, and I was impatient to be an Englishman again, and persevered day after day, month after month, till at the end of a couple of years I began to weary of the English language, an awkward, blunt instrument, unfitted for delicate work it seemed to me to be in the works of David Christie Murray and Robert Buchanan. And one night in Cecil Street, I threw "The Seamy Side" across the room with a cry of despair. "All this is pure commerce," I groaned, and fell to thinking of Miss Braddon, remembering her with kindliness, for it was she who had put Shelley into my hand long ago, when I lived by the side of an Irish lake, and thought it would be a good thing to ride in the Liverpool Steeplechase. Ouida had inflamed me in my teens. At last I met Mrs. Lynn Linton, and liked her; but she was elderly, her style vehement and arid; and every night I went up to the Café Monico to buy a French paper which was publishing Goncourt's "La Fille Eliza," a story that enchanted me in my lonely lodging and awakened new dreams of the conquest of London. I read with disapprobation the "Story of an African Farm"; descriptions of sandhills and ostriches sandwiched with doubts concerning a future state, and convictions regarding the moral and physical superiority of women in plenty, but of art nothing; that is to say, art as I understand

it—rhythmical sequence of events described with rhythmical sequence of phrase. After the " African Farm," the " Story of Elizabeth," by Miss Thackeray, came upon me with all the fresh and fair naturalness of a garden full of lilacs and blue sky. " Only a water-colour," I said, " but what a beautiful water-colour !" and I continued her exquisite little descriptions, full of air, colour, lightness, grace, the French life seen with sweet English eyes, the dear little descriptions gently evocative. " What a tranquil little kitchen it was, with a glimpse of the courtyard outside, and the cocks and hens, and the poplar trees waving in the sunshine, and the old woman sitting in her white cap busy at her homely work !" Into many wearisome pages these simple lines have since been expanded, but without affecting the beauty of the original. " Will Dampier turned his broad back and looked out of the window. There was a moment's silence. They could hear the tinkling of bells, the whistling of the sea, the voices of the men calling to each other in the port. The sunshine streamed in ; Elly was standing in it, and seemed gilt with a golden background. She ought to have held a palm in her hand, poor little martyr !"

There is sweet wisdom in this book, wisdom that is eternal, being simple ; and I do not rail against dainty water-colour indications of balconies, vases, gardens, fields, and harvesters because they have not the fervid glow and passionate force of Titian's Ariadne. Miss Thackeray knew the limits of her talent, which is more than can be said for George Eliot, despite the many profound modulations of that Beethoven-like countryside : the pine wood and the cripple ; this aunt's linen presses, and that one's economies ; the boy going forth to conquer the world, the girl remaining at home to conquer herself ; the mighty river holding the fate of all, playing and dallying with its people for a while, and bearing them on at last to extinction. She had the sense of rhythmical progression : but a woman cannot become a man, and it is not certain that, if pleasure be a condition of artistic performance,

we do not get more from contemplating Elly and Maggie. Her golden head is sketched with a flowing water-colour brush on a background of austere French Protestants. We do not know whether the picture is true to nature; but we know that it is true to art; our objections do not begin till her marriage, which seems to us a jarring dissonance, the true end being the ruin of Elly and the remorse of her mother.

It was Margaret Veley who spoke to me first about "The Story of Elizabeth," when I was introduced to her in a Kensington drawing-room, a tall, shy woman, declining wittily, without regret, into middle age, and whom I preferred to the showy women scattered about the sofas and chairs on the look-out for a young man. In a few minutes she admitted to me that what I had heard was true; she had published a novel in the *Cornhill Magazine*. Such a success as that was the blue ribbon of literature in those days, and for it she became admirable in my eyes, and I took pleasure in her intelligence which I learnt in many visits. On her side she was beguiled by a certain alertness of mind, a curious absence of education, and it became her pleasure to correct my proofs, and with every correction she helped me out of the French into the English language.

All the world over there are women willing to sacrifice themselves, and Margaret Veley would have come into great literary honours, I am convinced, if she had not laid down her life for her sister, a woman stricken with consumption. One day I called to ask for some proofs, and received this note: "I am too ill to correct them; you know I would if I were able." And next day a soul passed out of life always associated in my memory with her beautiful novel "Damocles." Rachel Conway is to me none other than Margaret Veley herself, a victim chosen for her beauty and crowned with the flowers of sacrifice. She has not forgotten the face of the maniac, and it comes back to her when she finds herself rich and loved by the man whom she loves. The catastrophe is a double one. Now she knows she is accursed, and that her

duty is to trample out her love, unborn generations cry to her; but Rachel Conway puts her dreams away, and will henceforth walk in a sad path, her interests centred in the child of the man she loves, and as she looks for a last time on the cloud of trees, glorious and waving green in the sunset, her sorrow swells once again to passion, and, we know, for the last time.

I aver that Mr. R. L. Stevenson never wrote a line that failed to delight me; but he never wrote a book. We arrive at a strangely just estimate of a writer's worth by the mere question: "What is he the author of?" for every writer whose work is destined to live is the author of one book that outshines the others, and, in popular imagination, epitomizes his talent and position. Ask the same question about Milton, Fielding, Byron, Carlyle, Thackeray, Zola, Mr. Swinburne.

I think of Mr. Stevenson as a consumptive youth weaving garlands of sad flowers with pale, weak hands, or leaning to a large plate-glass window, and scratching thereon exquisite profiles with a diamond pencil. His periods are fresh and bright, rhythmical in sound, and perfect realizations of their sense; in reading him one often thinks that never before was such definiteness united to such poetry of expression; every page and every sentence rings of its individuality. But Mr. Stevenson's style is well dressed, over-smart, shall I say, like a young man walking in the Burlington Arcade? Yes, I will say so, but I will add, the most gentlemanly young man that ever walked in the Burlington. Mr. Stevenson is competent to understand any thought that might be presented to him, but if he were to use it, it would instantly become neat, sharp, ornamental, light, and graceful, and it would lose all its original richness and harmony. It is not Mr. Stevenson's brain that prevents him from being a thinker, but his style.

Another thing that strikes me in thinking of Stevenson (I pass over his direct indebtedness to Edgar Poe, and his constant appropriation of his methods) is the unsuitableness of

the special characteristics of his talent to the age he lives in. He wastes in his limitations, and his talent is vented in prettiness of style. In speaking of Mr. Henry James, I said that, although he had conceded much to the foolish, false, and hypocritical taste of the time, the concessions he made had in little or nothing impaired his talent. The very opposite seems to me the case with Mr. Stevenson. For if any man living in this end of the century needed freedom of expression for the distinct development of his genius, that man is R. L. Stevenson. He who runs may read, and he with any knowledge of literature will, before I have written the words, have imagined Mr. Stevenson writing in the age of Elizabeth or Anne.

Turn your platitudes prettily, but write no word that could offend the chaste mind of the young girl who has spent her morning reading the Colin Campbell divorce case ; so says the age we live in. The penny paper that may be bought everywhere, that is allowed to lie on every table, prints seven or eight columns of filth, for no reason except that the public likes to read filth ; the poet and novelist must emasculate and destroy their work because . . . Who shall come forward and make answer ? Oh, vile, filthy, and hypocritical century, I at least scorn you.

But this book is not a course of literature, and I will tarry no longer with mere criticism, but go direct to the book to which I owe the last temple in my soul—" Marius the Epicurean." Well I remember when I read the opening lines, and how they came upon me sweetly as the flowing breath of a bright spring. I knew that I was awakened a fourth time, that a fourth vision of life was to be given to me. Shelley had revealed to me the unimagined skies where the spirit sings of light and grace ; Gautier had shown me how extravagantly beautiful is the visible world and how divine is the rage of the flesh ; and with Balzac I had descended circle by circle into the nether world of the soul, and watched its afflictions. Then there were minor awakenings. Zola had

enchanted me with decoration and inebriated me with theory; Flaubert had astonished with the wonderful delicacy and subtlety of his workmanship; Goncourt's brilliant adjectival effects had captivated me for a time, but all these impulses were crumbling into dust, these aspirations were etiolated, sickly as faces grown old in gaslight.

I had not thought of the simple and unaffected joy of the heart of natural things; the colour of the open air, the many forms of the country, the birds flying—that one making for the sea; the abandoned boat, the dwarf roses and wild lavender; nor had I thought of the beauty of mildness in life, and how by a certain avoidance of the wilfully passionate, and the surely ugly, we may secure an aspect of temporal life which is abiding and soul-sufficing. A new dawn was in my brain, fresh and fair, full of wide temples and studious hours, and the lurking fragrance of incense; that such a vision of life was possible I had no suspicion, and it came upon me almost with the same strength, almost as intensely, as that divine song of the flesh, Mademoiselle de Maupin.

In my mind, these books will be always intimately associated; and when a few adventitious points of difference are forgotten, it is interesting to note how firm is the alliance, and how cognate and co-equal the sympathies on which it is based; the same glad worship of the visible world, and the same incurable belief that the beauty of material things is sufficient for all the needs of life. Mr. Pater can join hands with Gautier in saying—*je trouve la terre aussi belle que le ciel, et je pense que la correction de la forme est la vertu.* And I too am of their company—in this at least I too love the great pagan world, its bloodshed, its slaves, its injustice, its loathing of all that is feeble.

But "Marius the Epicurean" was more to me than a mere emotional influence, precious and rare though that may be, for this book was the first in English prose I had come across that procured for me any genuine pleasure in the language itself, in the combination of words for silver or gold chime, and un-

conventional cadence, and for all those lurking half-meanings, and that evanescent suggestion, like the odour of dead roses, that words retain to the last of other times and elder usage. Until I read " Marius " the English language (English prose) was to me what French must be to the majority of English readers. I read for the sense and that was all ; the language itself seemed to me coarse and plain, and awoke in me neither æsthetic emotion nor even interest. " Marius " was the stepping-stone that carried me across the channel into the genius of my own tongue. The translation was not too abrupt ; I found a constant and careful invocation of meaning that was a little aside of the common comprehension, and also a sweet depravity of ear for unexpected falls of phrase, and of eye for the less observed depths of colours, which although new was a sort of sequel to the education I had chosen, and a continuance of it in a foreign, but not wholly unfamiliar medium ; and having saturated myself with Pater, the passage in De Quincey was easy. He, too, was a Latin in manner and in temper of mind ; but he was truly English, and through him I passed to the study of the Elizabethan dramatists, the real literature of my race, and washed myself clean of France.

CHAP. XIII

THOUGHTS IN A STRAND LODGING

Emma has undressed and put the last child away—stowed the last child away in some mysterious and unapproachable corner that none knows of but she ; the fat landlady has ceased to loiter about my door, has ceased to tempt me with offers of brandy and water, tea and toast, the inducements that occur to her landlady's mind ; the actress from the Savoy has ceased to walk up and down the street with the young man who accompanies her home from the theatre ; she has ceased to

linger on the doorstep talking to him, her key has grated in the lock, she has come upstairs, we have had our usual midnight conversation on the landing, she has told me her latest hopes of obtaining a part, she has told me of the husband whom she was obliged to leave ; we have bidden each other good-night ; she has gone up the creaky staircase, and I have returned to my room, littered with MSS. and queer publications ! . . . the night is hot and heavy, but now a wind is blowing from the river, and listless and lonely I open a book, the first book that comes to hand. It is " Le Journal des Goncourts," p. 358, the end of a chapter :—

" *It is really curious that it should be the four men the most free from all taint of handicraft and all base commercialism, the four pens the most entirely devoted to art, that were arraigned before the public prosecutor : Baudelaire, Flaubert, and ourselves.*"

Goncourt's statement is suggestive (and I leave it uncommented on) ; but I would put by its side another naked simple truth. That if in England the public prosecutor does not seek to override literature the means of tyranny are not wanting, whether they be the tittle-tattle of the nursery or the lady's drawing-room, or the shameless combinations entered into by librarians. . . . In England as in France those who loved literature the most purely, who were the least mercenary in their love, were marked out for persecution, and all three were driven into exile. Byron and Shelley, and Swinburne, he, too, who loved literature for its own sake, was forced, amid cries of indignation and horror, to withdraw his book from the reach of a public that was rotting then amid the garbage of the Yelverton divorce case. I think of these facts and turn to the prose poem, in which Baudelaire tells how a dog will run away howling if you hold to him a bottle of choice scent, but if you offer him some putrid morsel picked out of some gutter hole, he will sniff round it joyfully, and will seek to lick your hand for gratitude. Baudelaire compared that dog to the public.

When I read Balzac's stories of Bautrin and Lucien de

Rubemkré, I often think of Hadrian and Antinous. I wonder if Balzac thought of transposing the Roman Emperor and his favourite into modern life. It is the kind of thing that Balzac would think of. No critic has ever noticed this.

Sometimes, at night, when all is still, and I look out on that desolate river, I think I shall go mad with grief, with wild regret for my beautiful *appartement* in Rue de la Tour des Dames. How different the present from the past! I hate with my whole soul this London lodging, and all that concerns it—Emma, and eggs and bacon, the lascivious landlady and her smutty daughter; I am weary of the sentimental actress who lives upstairs, I swear I will never go out to talk to her on the landing again. Then there is failure—I can do nothing, nothing; my novel I know is worthless; my life is a leaf, it will flutter out of sight. I am weary of everything, and wish I were back in Paris. I am weary of reading, there is nothing to read, Flaubert bores me. What nonsense has been talked about him! Impersonal! He is the most personal writer. But his odious pessimism! How weary I am of it, it never ceases, it is lugged in *à tout propos* and the little lyrical phrase with which he winds up every paragraph, how boring it is! Happily, I have " A Rebours " to read, that prodigious book, that beautiful mosaic. Huysmans is quite right, ideas are well enough until you are twenty, afterwards only words are bearable . . . a new idea, what can be more insipid—fit for Members of Parliament. Shall I go to bed? No. I would that I had a volume of Verlaine, or something of Mallarmé's to read—Mallarmé for preference. Huysmans speaks of Mallarmé in " A Rebours," and in hours like these a page of Huysmans is as a dose of opium, a glass of something exquisite and spirituous.

" The decadence of a literature irreparably attacked in its organism, weakened by the age of ideas, overworn by the excess of syntax, sensible only of the curiosity which fevers sick people, but nevertheless hastening to explain everything in its decline, desirous of repairing all the omissions of its

youth, to bequeath all the most subtle memories of its suffering on its deathbed, is incarnate in Mallarmé in most consummate and absolute fashion. . . .

"The poem in prose is the form, above all others they prefer; handled by an alchemist of genius, it should contain in a state of meat the entire strength of the novel, the long analysis and the superfluous description of which it suppresses . . . the adjective placed in such an ingenious and definite way, that it could not be legally dispossessed of its place, would open up such perspectives, that the reader would dream for whole weeks together on its meaning at once precise and multiple, affirm the present, reconstruct the past, divine the future of the souls of the characters revealed by the light of the unique epithet. The novel thus understood, thus condensed into one or two pages, would be a communion of thought between a magical writer and an ideal reader, a spiritual collaboration by consent between ten superior persons scattered through the universe, a delectation offered to the most refined, and accessible only to them."

Huysmans goes to my soul like a gold ornament of Byzantine workmanship: there is in his style the yearning charm of arches, a sense of ritual, the passion of the Gothic, of the window. Ah! in this hour of weariness for one of Mallarmé's prose poems! Stay, I remember I have some numbers of *La Vogue*. One of the numbers contains, I know, "Forgotten Pages"; I will translate word for word, preserving the very rhythm, one or two of these miniature marvels of diction :—

I

FORGOTTEN PAGES

"Since Maria left me to go to another star—which? Orion, Altair, or thou, green Venus?—I have always cherished solitude. What long days I have passed alone with my cat. By alone, I mean without a material being, and my cat is a mystical companion—a spirit. I can, therefore, say that I

have passed whole days alone with my cat, and alone with one of the last authors of the Latin decadence; for since that white creature is no more, strangely and singularly I have loved all that the word *fall* expresses. In such wise that my favourite season of the year is the last weary days of summer, which immediately precede autumn, and the hour I choose to walk in is when the sun rests before disappearing, with rays of yellow copper on the grey walls and red copper on the tiles. In the same way the literature that my soul demands—a sad voluptuousness—is the dying poetry of the last moments of Rome, but before it has breathed at all the rejuvenating approach of the barbarians, or has begun to stammer the infantile Latin of the first Christian poetry.

"I was reading, therefore, one of those dear poems (whose paint has more charm for me than the blush of youth), had plunged one hand into the fur of the pure animal, when a barrel-organ sang languidly and melancholy beneath my window. It played in the great alley of poplars, whose leaves appear to me yellow, even in the spring-tide, since Maria passed there with the tall candles for the last time. The instrument is the saddest, yes, truly; the piano scintillates, the violin opens the torn soul to the light, but the barrel-organ, in the twilight of remembrance, made me dream despairingly. Now it murmurs an air joyously vulgar which awakens joy in the heart of the suburbs, an air old-fashioned and commonplace. Why do its flourishes go to my soul, and make me weep like a romantic ballad? I listen, imbibing it slowly, and I do not throw a penny out of the window for fear of moving from my place, and seeing that the instrument is not singing itself.

II

"The old Saxony clock, which is slow, and which strikes thirteen amid its flowers and gods, to whom did it belong? Thinkest that it came from Saxony by the mail coaches of old time?

" (Singular shadows hang about the worn-out panes.)

" And thy Venetian mirror, deep as a cold fountain in its bands of gilt work ; what is reflected there ? Ah ! I am sure that more than one woman bathed there in her beauty's sin ; and, perhaps, if I looked long enough, I should see a naked phantom.

" Wicked one, thou often sayest wicked things.

" (I see the spiders' webs above the lofty windows.)

" Our wardrobe is very old ; see how the fire reddens its sad panels ! the weary curtains are as old, and the tapestry on the armchairs stripped of paint, and the old engravings, and all these old things. Does it not seem to thee that even these blue birds are discoloured by time ?

" (Dream not of the spiders' webs that tremble above the lofty windows.)

" Thou lovest all that, and that is why I live by thee. When one of my poems appeared, didst thou not desire, my sister, whose looks are full of yesterdays, the words, the grace of faded things ? New objects displease thee ; thee also do they frighten with their loud boldness, and thou feelest as if thou shouldst use them—a difficult thing indeed to do, for thou hast no taste for action.

" Come, close thy old German almanack that thou readest with attention, though it appeared more than a hundred years ago, and the Kings it announces are all dead, and, lying on this antique carpet, my head leaned upon thy charitable knees, on the pale robe, oh ! calm child, I will speak with thee for hours ; there are no fields, and the streets are empty, I will speak to thee of our furniture.

" Thou art abstracted ?

" (The spiders' webs are shivering above the lofty windows.)"

We, the " ten superior persons scattered through the universe," think these prose poems the concrete essence, the osmazome of literature, the essential oil of art, others, those in the stalls, will judge them to be the aberrations of a refined

mind, distorted with hatred of the commonplace ; the pit will immediately declare them to be nonsense, and will return with satisfaction to the last leading article in the daily paper.

III

The pale sky that lies above a world ending in decrepitude will perhaps pass away with the clouds : the tattered purple of the sunset is fading in a river sleeping on the horizon submerged in sunlight and in water. The trees are tired ; and beneath their whitened leaves (whitened by the dust of time rather than by that of the roads) rises the canvas house of the Interpreter of Past Things : many a lamp awaits the twilight and lightens the faces of an unhappy crowd, conquered by the immortal malady and the sin of the centuries, of men standing by their wretched accomplices quick with the miserable fruit with which the world shall perish. In the unquiet silence of every eye supplicating yonder sun, which, beneath the water, sinks with the despair of a cry, listen to the simple patter of the showman : " No sign regales you of the spectacle within, for there is not now a painter capable of presenting any sad shadow of it. I bring alive (and preserved through the years by sovereign science) a woman of old time. Some folly, original and simple, an ecstasy of gold, I know not what she names it, her hair falls with the grace of rich stuffs about her face, and contrasts with the bloodlike nudity of her lips. In place of the vain gown, she has a body ; and the eyes, though like rare stones, are not worth the look that leaps from the happy flash : the breasts, raised as if filled with an eternal milk, are pointed to the sky, and the smooth limbs still keep the salt of the primal sea." Remembering their poor wives, bald, morbid, and full of horror, the husbands press forward : and the wives, too, impelled by melancholy curiosity, wish to see.

When all have looked upon the noble creature, vestige of an epoch already accursed, some, indifferent, have not the power

to comprehend, but others, whelmed in grief and their eyelids wet with tears of resignation, gaze at each other ; whilst the poets of these times, feeling their dead eyes brighten, drag themselves to their lamps, their brains drunk for a moment with a vague glory, haunted with Rhythm, and forgetful that they live in an age that has outlived beauty.

" *J'ai fait mes adieux à ma mère et je viens pour vous faire les miens,*" and other absurdities by Ponson du Terrail amused us many a year in France, and in later days similar bad grammar by Georges Ohnet has not been lost upon us, but neither Ponson du Terrail nor Georges Ohnet sought literary suffrage ; such a thing could not be in France, but in England, Rider Haggard, whose literary atrocities are more atrocious than his accounts of slaughter, receives the attention of leading journals and writes about the revival of Romance. As it is as difficult to write the worst as the best conceivable sentence, I take this one and place it for its greater glory in my less remarkable prose :—

" *As we gazed on the beauties thus revealed by Good, a spirit of emulation filled our breasts, and we set to work to get ourselves up as well as we could.*"

A return to romance ! a return to the animal, say I.

One thing that cannot be denied to the realists : a constant and intense desire to write well, to write artistically. When I think of what they have done in the matter of the use of words, of the myriad verbal effects they have discovered, of the thousand forms of composition they have created, how they have remodelled and refashioned the language in their untiring striving for intensity of expression, for the very osmazome of art, I am lost in ultimate wonder and admiration. What Hugo did for French verse, Flaubert, Goncourt, Zola, and Huysmans have done for French prose. No more literary school than the realists has ever existed, and I do not except even the Elizabethans. And for this reason our failures are more interesting than the vulgar successes of our opponents ;

for when we fall into the sterile and distorted, it is through our noble and incurable hatred of the commonplace, of all that is popular.

The healthy school is played out in England ; all that could be said has been said. The successors of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot have no ideal, and consequently no language, nothing new to say, and the reason of this heaviness of expression is that the avenues are closed, no new subject-matter is introduced, the language of English fiction is stagnant. But if the realists should catch favour in England the English tongue may be saved, for with the new subjects they would introduce new forms of language would arise.

" Carmen Sylva !" How easy it is to divine the æstheticism of anyone signing, " Carmen Sylva."

In youth the genius of Shelley astonished me ; but now I find the stupidity of the ordinary person infinitely more surprising.

That I may die childless—that when my hour comes I may turn my face to the wall saying, I have not increased the great evil of human life—then, though I were a murderer, fornicator, thief, and liar, my sins shall melt even as a cloud. But he who dies with children about him, though his life were in all else an excellent deed, shall be held accursed by the truly wise, and the stain upon him shall endure for ever.

I realize that this is truth, the one truth, and the whole truth ; and yet the vainest woman that ever looked in a glass never regretted her youth more than I, or felt the disgrace of middle age more keenly. She has her portrait painted, I write these confessions ; each hopes to save something of the past, and escape somehow the ravening waves of time and float into some haven of remembrance. St. Augustine's Confessions are the story of a God-tortured, mine of an art-tortured, soul. Which subject is the most living ? The first ! for man is stupid and still loves his conscience as a child loves a

toy. Now the world plays with "Robert Elsmere." This book seems to me like a suite of spacious, well-distributed, and well-proportioned rooms. Looking round, I say, 'tis a pity these rooms are only in plaster of Paris.

"Les Palais Nomades" is a really beautiful book, and it is free from all the faults that make an absolute and supreme enjoyment of great poetry an impossibility. For it is in the first place free from those pests and parasites of artistic work—ideas. Of all literary qualities the creation of ideas is the most fugitive. Think of the fate of an author who puts forward a new idea to-morrow in a book, in a play, in a poem. The new idea is seized upon, it becomes common property, it is dragged through newspaper articles, magazine articles, through books, it is repeated in clubs, drawing-rooms; it is bandied about the corners of streets; in a week it is wearisome, in a month it is an abomination. Who has not felt a sickening feeling come over him when he hears such phrases as "To be or not to be, that is the question"? Shakespeare was really great when he wrote, "Music to hear, why hearest thou music sadly?" not when he wrote, "The apparel oft proclaims the man." Could he be freed from his ideas, what a poet we should have! Therefore, let those who have taken firsts at Oxford devote their trite souls to preparing an edition from which everything resembling an idea shall be excluded. We might then shut up our Marlowes and our Beaumonts and resume our reading of the bard, and the witless foists would confer happiness on many, and crown themselves with truly immortal bays.

Gustave Kahn took counsel of the past, and he has successfully avoided everything that even a hostile critic might be tempted to term an idea; and for this I am grateful. Nor is his volume a collection of miscellaneous verses bound together. He has chosen a certain sequence of emotions; the circumstances out of which these emotions have sprung are given in a short prose note. "Les Palais Nomades" is therefore a novel

in essence ; description and analysis are eliminated, and only the moments when life grows lyrical with suffering are recorded ; recorded in many varying metres conforming only to the play of the emotion, for, unlike many who, having once discovered a tune, apply it promiscuously to every subject they treat, Kahn adapts his melody to the emotion he is expressing, with the same propriety and grace as Nature distributes perfume to her flowers. For an example of magical transition of tone I turn to *Intermède.*

" Chère apparence, viens aux couchants illuminés.
Veux-tu mieux des matins albes et calmes ?
Les soirs et les matins ont des calmes rosâtres,
Les eaux ont des manteaux de cristal irisé
Et des rythmes de calmes palmes
Et l'air évoque de calmes musiques de pâtres.

Viens sous des tendelets aux fleuves souriants
Aux lilas pâlis des nuits d'Orient
Aux glauques étendues à falbalas d'argent
A l'oasis des baisers urgents
Seulement vit le voile aux seuls Orients.

Quel que soit le spectacle et quelle que soit la rame
Et quelle que soit la voix qui s'affame et brame,
L'oubli du lointain des jours chatouille et serre,
Le lotos de l'oubli s'est fané dans mes serres,
Cependant tu m'aimais à jamais ?
Adieu pour jamais."

The repetitions of Edgar Poe seem hard and mechanical after this, so exquisite and evanescent is the rhythm, and the intonations come as sweetly and suddenly as a gust of perfume; it is as the vibration of a fairy orchestra, flute and violin disappearing in a silver mist ; but the clouds break, and all the enchantment of a spring garden appears in a shaft of sudden sunlight.

"L'éphémère idole, au frisson du printemps,
  Sentant des renouveaux éclore,
Se guèpa de satins si lointains et d'antan :
  Rose exilé des flores !

Le jardin rima ses branches de lilas ;
  Aux murs, les roses tremières ;
La terre étala, pour fêter les las,
  Des divans vert lumière ;

Des rires ailés peuplèrent le jardin ;
  Souriants des caresses brèves,
Des oiseaux joyaux, jaunes, incarnadins
  Vibrèrent aux ciels de rêve."

But to the devil with literature! Who cares if Gustave Kahn writes well or badly? I met a chappie yesterday whose views of life coincide with mine. "A ripping good dinner," he says; "get a skinful of champagne inside you, go to bed when it is light, and get up when you are rested."

Each century has its special ideal, the ideal of the nineteenth is the young man. The eighteenth century is only woman—see the tapestries, the delightful goddesses who have discarded their hoops and heels to appear in still more delightful nakedness, the noble woods, the tall castles, with the hunters looking round; no servile archæology chills the fancy; and this treatment of antiquity is the highest proof of the genius of the eighteenth century. See the Fragonards—the ladies in high-peaked bodices, their little ankles showing amid the snow of the petticoats. Up they go; you can hear their light false voices amid the summer of the leaves, where Loves are garlanded even as roses. Masks and arrows are everywhere, all the machinery of light and gracious days. In the Watteaus the note is more pensive; there is satin and sunset, plausive gestures and reluctance—false reluctance; the guitar is tinkling, and exquisite are the notes in the languid evening;

and there is the Pierrot, that marvellous white animal, sensual and witty and glad, the soul of the century—ankles and epigrams everywhere, for love was not then sentimental, it was false, and a little cruel ; see the furnitnre and the polished floor, and the tapestries with whose delicate tints and decorations the high hair blends, the foot-stool and the heel and the calf of the leg that is withdrawn, showing in the shadows of the lace ; see the satin of the bodices, the fan outspread, the wigs so adorably false, the knee-breeches, the buckles on the shoes, how false ; adorable little comedy, adorably mendacious ; and how winsome it is to feast on these sweet lies, it is indeed delight to us, wearied with the bland sincerity of newspapers. In the eighteenth century it was the man who knelt at the woman's feet, it was the man who pleaded and the woman who acceded ; but in our century the place of the man is changed, it is he who holds the fan, it is he who is besought ; and if one were to dream of continuing the tradition of Watteau and Fragonard in the nineteenth century, he would have to take note of and meditate deeply and profoundly on this, as he sought to formulate and synthesize the erotic spirit of our age.

The position of a young man in the nineteenth century is the most enviable that has ever fallen to the lot of any human creature. He is the rare bird, and is fêted, flattered, adored. The sweetest words are addressed to him, the most loving looks are poured upon him. The young man can do no wrong. Every house is open to him, and the best of everything is laid before him ; girls dispute the right to serve him ; they come to him with cake and wine, they sit circlewise and listen to him, and when one is fortunate to get him alone she will hang upon his neck, she will propose to him, and will take his refusal kindly and without resentment. They will not let him stoop to tie up his shoe-lace, but will rush and simultaneously claim the right to attend on him. To represent in a novel a girl proposing marriage to man would be deemed unnatural, but nothing is more common ; there are few young men who have not received at least a dozen offers, nay, more ;

it is characteristic, it has become instinctive for girls to choose, and they prefer men not to make love to them ; and every young man who knows his business avoids making advances, knowing well that it will only put the girl off.

In a society so constituted, what a delightful opening there is for a young man. He would have to waltz perfectly, play tennis fairly, the latest novel would suffice for literary attainments ; billiards, shooting, and hunting would not come in amiss, for he must not be considered a useless being by men ; not that women are much influenced by the opinion of men in their choice of favourites, but the reflex action of the heart, although not so marked as that of the stomach, exists, and must be kept in view ; besides a man who would succeed with women, must succeed with men ; the real Lovelace is loved by all. Like gravitation, love draws all things. Our young man would have to be five feet eleven, or six feet, broad shoulders, light brown hair, deep eyes, soft and suggestive, a thin neck, long delicate hands, a high instep. His nose should be straight, his face oval and small, he must be clean about the hips, and his movements must be naturally caressing. He comes into the ballroom, his shoulders well back, he stretches his hand to the hostess, he looks at her earnestly (it is characteristic of him to think of the hostess first, he is in her house, the house is well furnished, and is suggestive of excellent meats and wines). He can read through the slim woman whose black hair, a-glitter with diamonds, contrasts with her white satin ; an old man is talking to her, she dances with him, and she refused a young man a moment before. This is a bad sign ; our Lovelace knows it ; there is a stout woman of thirty-five, who is looking at him, red satin bodice, doubtful taste. He looks away ; a little blonde woman fixes her eyes on him, she looks as innocent as a child ; instinctively our Lovelace turns to his host. " Who is that little blonde woman over there, the right-hand corner ?" he asks. " Ah, that is Lady ——." " Will you introduce me ?" " Certainly." Lovelace has made up his mind. Then there is a young

oldish girl, richly dressed; "I hear her people have a nice house in a hunting country, I will dance with her, and take the mother in to supper, and, if I can get a moment, will have a pleasant talk with the father in the evening."

In manner Lovelace is facile and easy; he never says no, it is always yes, ask him what you will; but he only does what he has made up his mind it is his advantage to do. Apparently he is an embodiment of all that is unselfish, for he knows that after he has helped himself, it is advisable to help someone else, and thereby make a friend who, on a future occasion, will be useful to him. Put a violinist into a room filled with violins, and he will try every one. Lovelace will put each woman aside so quietly that she is often only half aware that she has been put aside. Her life is broken; she is content that it should be broken. The real genius for love lies not in getting into, but getting out of love.

I have noticed that there are times when every second woman likes us. Is love, then, a magnetism which we sometimes possess and exercise unconsciously, and sometimes do not possess?

CHAP. XIV

Now I am full of eager impulses that mourn and howl by turns, striving for utterance like wind in turret chambers. I hate this infernal lodging. I feel like a fowl in a coop—that landlady, those children, Emma. . . . The actress will be coming upstairs presently; shall I ask her into my room? Better let things remain as they are.

Conscience.

Why intrude a new vexation on her already vexed life?

I.

Hallo, you startled me! Well, I am surprised. We

have not talked together for a long time. Since when ?

Conscience.

I will spare your feelings. I merely thought I would remind you that you have passed the Rubicon—your thirtieth year.

I.

It is terrible to think of. My youth gone !

Conscience.

Then you are ashamed—you repent ?

I.

I am ashamed of nothing—I am a writer ; 'tis my profession to be ashamed of nothing but to be ashamed.

Conscience

I had forgotten.

I.

But I will chat with you when you please ; even now, at this hour, about all things, about any of my sins.

Conscience.

Since we lost sight of each other you have devoted your time to the gratification of your senses.

I.

Pardon me, I have devoted quite as much of my time to art.

Conscience.

You were glad, I remember, when your father died, because his death gave you unlimited facilities for moulding the partial self which the restraining influence of home had only permitted, into that complete and ideal George Moore which you had in mind. I think I quote you correctly.

I.

You don't; but never mind. Proceed.

Conscience.

Then, if you have no objection, we will examine how far you have turned your opportunities to account.

I.

You will not deny that I have educated myself and made many friends

Conscience.

Friends! your nature is very adaptable—you interest yourself in their pursuits, and so deceive them into a false estimate of your work. Your education—speak not of it; it is but flimsy stuff.

I.

There I join issue with you. Have I not drawn the intense ego out of the clouds of semi-consciousness, and realized it? And surely, the rescue and the individualization of the ego is the first step.

Conscience.

To what end? You have nothing to teach, nothing to reveal. I have often thought of asking you this: since death is the only good, why do you not embrace death? Of all the world's good it is the cheapest, and the most easily obtained.

I.

We must live since nature has willed it so. My poor conscience, are you still struggling in the fallacy of free will?

For at least a hundred thousand years man has rendered this planet abominable and ridiculous with what he is pleased to call his intelligence, without, however, having learned that his life is merely the breaking of the peace of unconsciousness, the drowsy uplifting of tired eyelids of somnolent nature. How

glibly this loquacious ape chatters of his religion and his moral sense, always failing to see that both are but allurements and inveiglements! With religion he is induced to bear his misery, and his sexual appetite is preserved, ignorant, and vigorous, by means of morals. A scorpion, surrounded by a ring of fire, will sting itself to death, and man would turn upon life and deny it, if his reason were complete. Religion and morals are the poker and tongs with which nature intervenes and scatters the ring of reason.

Conscience (after a long pause).

I believe—forgive my ignorance, but I have seen so little of you this long while—that your boast is that no woman influenced, changed, or modified your views of life.

I.

None; my mind is a blank on the subject Stay! my mother said once, when I was a boy, "You must not believe them; all their smiles and pretty ways are only put on. Women like men only for what they can get out of them." And to these simple words I attribute all the suspicion of woman's truth which hung over my youth. For years it seemed to me impossible that women could love men. Women seemed to me so beautiful and desirable—men so ugly, almost revolting. Could they touch us without revulsion of feeling, could they really desire us? I was absorbed in the life of woman—the mystery of petticoats, so different from the staidness of trousers! the rolls of hair entwined with so much art, and suggesting so much colour and perfume, so different from the bare crop; the unnaturalness of the waist in stays! plenitude and slenderness of silk, so different from the stupidity of a black tail-coat; rose feet passing under the triple ruches of rose, so different from the broad foot of the male. My love for the life of women was a life within my life; and oh, how strangely secluded and veiled! A world of calm colour with phantoms moving, floating past and changing in

dim light—an averted face with abundant hair, the gleam of a perfect bust or the poise of a neck turning slowly round, the gaze of deep translucid eyes. I loved women too much to give myself wholly to one.

Conscience.

Yes, yes ; but what real success have you had with women ?

I.

Damn it ! you would not seek to draw me into long-winded stories about women—how it began, how it was broken off, how it began again ? I'm not Casanova. I love women as I love champagne—I drink it and enjoy it ; but an exact account of every bottle drunk would prove flat narrative.

Conscience.

You have never consulted me about your champagne loves : but you have asked me if you have ever inspired a real affection, and I told you that we cannot inspire in others what does not exist in ourselves. You have never known a nice woman who would have married you ?

I.

Why should I undertake to keep a woman by me for the entire space of her life, watching her grow fat, grey, wrinkled, and foolish ? Think of the annoyance of perpetually looking after anyone, especially a woman ! Besides, marriage is antagonistic to my ideal. You say that no ideal illumines the pessimist's life, that if you ask him why he exists, he cannot answer, and that Schopenhauer's arguments against suicide are not even plausible casuistry. True, on this point its reasoning is feeble and ineffective. But we may easily confute our sensual opponents. We must say that we do not commit suicide, although we admit it is a certain anodyne to the poison of life—an absolute erasure of the wrong inflicted on us by our parents—because we hope by noble example and

precept to induce others to refrain from love. We are the saviours of souls. Other crimes are finite; love alone is infinite. We punish a man with death for killing his fellow; but a little reflection should make the dullest understand that the crime of bringing a being into the world exceeds by a thousand, a millionfold that of putting one out of it.

Men are to-day as thick as flies in a confectioner's shop; in fifty years there will be less to eat, but certainly some millions more mouths. I laugh, I rub my hands! I shall be dead before the red time comes. I laugh at the religionists who say that God provides for those He brings into the world. The French Revolution will compare with the revolution that is to come, that must come, that is inevitable, as a puddle on the road-side compares with the sea. Men will hang like pears on every lamp-post, in every great quarter of London there will be an electric guillotine that will decapitate the rich like hogs in Chicago. Christ, who with his white feet trod out the blood of the ancient world, and promised Universal Peace, shall go out in a cataclysm of blood. The neck of mankind shall be opened, and blood shall cover the face of the earth.

Conscience.

Your philosophy is on a par with your painting and your poetry; but, then, I am a conscience, and a conscience is never philosophic—you go in for "The Philosophy of the Unconscious"?

I.

No, no, 'tis but a silly vulgarisation. But Schopenhauer, oh, my Schopenhauer! Say, shall I go about preaching hatred of women? Were I to call them a short-legged race that was admitted into society only a hundred and fifty years ago?

Conscience.

You cannot speak the truth even to me; no, not even at half past twelve at night.

I.

Surely of all hours this is the one in which it is advisable to play you false ?

Conscience.

You are getting humorous.

I.

I am getting sleepy. You are a tiresome old thing, a relic of the ancient world—I mean the mediæval world. You know that I now affect antiquity ?

Conscience.

You wander helplessly in the road of life until you stumble against a battery ; nerved with the shock you are frantic, and rush along wildly until the current received is exhausted, and you lapse into disorganization.

I.

If I am sensitive to and absorb the various potentialities of my age, am I not of necessity a power ?

Conscience.

To be the receptacle of and the medium through which unexplained forces work, is a very petty office to fulfil. Can you think of nothing higher ? Can you feel nothing original in you, a something that is cognizant of the end ?

I.

You are surely not going to drop into talking to me of God ?

Conscience.

You will not deny that I at least exist ? I am with you now, and intensely, far more than the dear friend with whom you love to walk in the quiet evening ; the women you have held to your bosom in the perfumed darkness of the chamber——

I.

Pray don't. " The perfumed darkness of the chamber " is very common. I was suckled on that kind of literature.

Conscience.

You are rotten to the root. Nothing but a very severe attack of indigestion would bring you to your senses—or a long lingering illness.

I.

'Pon my faith, you are growing melodramatic. Neither indigestion nor illness long drawn out can change me. I have torn you all to pieces long ago, and you have not now sufficient rags on your back to scare the rooks in seed-time.

Conscience.

In destroying me you have destroyed yourself.

I.

Edgar Poe, pure and simple. Don't pick holes in my originality until you have mended those in your own.

Conscience.

I was Poe's inspiration; he is eternal, being of me. But your inspiration springs from the flesh, and is therefore ephemeral even as the flesh.

I.

If you had read Schopenhauer you would know that the flesh is not ephemeral, but the eternal objectification of the will to live. Siva is represented, not only with the necklace of skulls, but with the lingam.

Conscience.

You have failed in all you have attempted, and the figure you have raised on your father's tomb is merely a sensitive and

sensuous art-cultured being who lives in a dirty lodging and plays in desperate desperation his last card. You are now writing a novel. The hero is a wretched creature, something like yourself. Do you think there is a public in England for that kind of thing ?

I.

Just the great Philistine that you always were ! What do you mean by a " public " ?

Conscience.

I have not a word to say on that account, your one virtue is sobriety.

I.

A wretched pun. . . . The mass of mankind run much after the fashion of the sheep of Panurge, but there are always a few that——

Conscience.

A few that are like the Gadarene swine

I.

Ah . . . were I the precipice, were I the sea in which the pigs might drown !

Conscience.

The same old desire of admiration, admiration in its original sense of wonderment (miratio) ; you are a true child of the century ; you do not desire admiration, you would avoid it, fearing it might lessen that sense which only you care to stimulate—wonderment. And persecuted by the desire to astonish, you are now exhibiting yourself in the most hideous light you can devise. The man whose biography you are writing is no better than a pimp.

I.

Then he is not like me ; I have never been a pimp, and I don't think I would be if I could.

Conscience.

The whole of your moral nature is reflected in Lewis Seymour, even to the " And I don't think I would be if I could." You would put me behind you if you could and return to the mending of the shameful little ballade, " La Ballad d'Alfred, Alfred aux Belles Dents," whose light o' love you enticed down here out of vanity, it being your vanity to destroy what remained in her of morality : it was her morality to give herself to no man but one except for money, and now she is really among the fallen. . . . What are you laughing at?

I.

I am thinking of her trouble of conscience, of the qualms she must suffer, for she is a Fleming to whose bedside a priest would be called if she were dying ; and the poor man, how would he shrive her, so strange would her point of view seem to him to be ; so different from his other penitents.

Conscience.

A shameful play of fancy. Let us be serious together ; you surely can be serious, if only for a moment. Try to recall to your mind the disgraceful scene that occurred a few months ago in your bedroom, the landlady at the foot of the bed ordering the woman whose conscience affords you so much amusement out of the house. But no, it will be better to avoid recollections of that scene, forget it, and tell me if you do not think that you did Alfred an injustice by writing the ballade.

I.

But he is represented as ruling the roost !

Conscience.

The distribution of that shameful ballade in manuscript has caused great inconvenience to Anatole Pellissier, the painter, whose safest way home now is the longest way round. You have heard that he doesn't dare to enter his street before three in the morning lest he receive an ill blow.

I.

And all because he is suspected of having written my little ballade.

Conscience.

Your wretched little ballade, wretched verses, if they are verses ; the opening lines of your second stanza zig-zags out of all possible prosody. Moreover, the ballade-maker who respects his art chooses a difficult rhyming word, and the choice of a word like " verre," to which a hundred rhymes might easily be found, is in itself a condemnation. Art is difficulty overcome.

I.

Banville's poetic principle, I know it, but in the most famous ballade of all, the ballade that made the ballade itself famous the rhyming is not more complex than mine.

" La belle romaine
Qui fut sa cousine germaine . . ."

" Ou sont ils vierge souveraine ?" Why " ils "? Were " ils " and " elles " interchangeable in the fifteenth century ? I can't see that " peine " is a more difficult word to rhyme to than " verre." My ballade goes very smoothly. Listen :

LA BALLADE D'ALFRED, ALFRED AUX BELLES DENTS

Je suis Alfred, l'Alfred aux belles dents,
Un très grand macq'illustre dans le square.
J'ai du poignon et de beaux vêtements,

Fins escarpins, gants, bague à grosse pierre,
Car, sur le truc ma femme est la plus chère.
Toujours de l'or, trois guineas, au moins deux,
Pour le plaisir d'un petit ordinaire . . .
Il en faut bien des messieurs sérieux.

Je m'absente du billard par moments
Pour voir si la putain travaille. . . . Un verre
Bah ! la tournée et plus d'emmerdements.
Copains, trinquons à la santé d'un père
Qui vient chez nous dans la nuit solitaire.
Il fait l'amour, il n'est pas de ces gueux
Qui casquent mal et sont si durs à plaire . . .
Il en faut bien des messieurs sérieux.

Le maquereau seul parmi les amants
Plane au-dessus de tout amour vulgaire.
Il met la main sur les petits romans
Qui troublent l'âme et font manquer l'affaire.
Les temps sont durs : sans le miché que faire ?
Et, nom de dieu ! pourquoi se ficher d'eaux ?
Je gueule au nez du roussin, ce faux frère :
Il en faut bien des messieurs sérieux.

ENVOI

Roi du trottoir je le suis, et très fière
Elle m'attend la voix pleine d'aveux.
Je prends la braise et je la fous par terre.
Il en faut bien des messieurs sérieux.

Conscience.

Your ballade does not appear to me on second hearing any better than it did on the first. I cannot abide your ballade, so there's an end of it.

I.

Now you're talking just like Gosse.

Conscience.

One word more. You have failed in everything you have attempted, and you will continue to fail until you consider those moral principles—those rules of conduct which the race has built up, guided by an unerring instinct of self-preservation. Humanity defends herself against those who attempt to subvert her ; and none, neither Napoleon nor the wretched scribbler such as you are, has escaped her vengeance.

I.

You would have me pull down the black flag and turn myself into an honest merchantman, with children in the hold and a wife at the helm. You would remind me that grey hairs begin to show, that health falls into rags, that high spirits split like canvas, and that in the end the bright buccaneer drifts, an old derelict, tossed by the waves of ill fortune, and buffeted by the winds into those dismal bays and dangerous offings—housekeepers, nurses, and uncomfortable chambers. Such will be my fate ; and since none may avert his fate, none can do better than to run pluckily the course which he must pursue.

Conscience.

You might devise a moral ending ; one that would conciliate all classes.

I.

It is easy to see that you are a nineteenth-century conscience.

Conscience.

I do not hope to find a Saint Augustine in you.

I.

An idea ; one of these days I will write my confessions ! Again I tell you that nothing really matters to me but art. And, knowing this, you chatter of the unwisdom of my not

concluding my novel with some foolish moral. . . . Nothing matters to me but art.

Conscience.

Would you seduce the wretched servant girl if by so doing you could pluck out the mystery of her being and set it down on paper !

CHAP. XV

AND now, hypocritical reader, I will answer the questions which have been agitating you this long while, which you have asked at every stage of this long narrative of a sinful life.* Shake not your head, lift not your finger, exquisitely hypocritical reader : you can deceive me in nothing. I know the base and unworthy soul. This is a magical *tête-à-tête*, such a one as will never happen in your life again ; therefore I say let us put off all customary disguise, let us be frank : you have been angrily asking, exquisitely hypocritical reader, why you have been *forced* to read this record of sinful life ; in your exquisite hypocrisy, you have said over and over again, what good purpose can it serve for a man to tell us of his unworthiness unless, indeed, it is to show us how he may rise, as if on stepping-stones of his dead self, to higher things, etc. ? You sighed, O hypocritical friend, and you threw the magazine on the wicker table, where such things lie, and you murmured something about leaving the word a little better than you found it, and you went down to dinner and lost consciousness of the world† in the animal enjoyment of your stomach. I hold out my hand to you, I embrace you, you are my brother, and I say, undeceive yourself, you will leave the world no

*The use of the word sinful here seems liable to misinterpretation. The phrase should run : "Of a virtuous life, for remember that my virtues are your vices."

†This should run : "Forgot your hypocrisy."

better than you found it. The pig that is being slaughtered as I write this line will leave the world better than it found it, but you will leave only a putrid carcase fit for nothing but worms. Look back upon your life, examine it, probe it, weigh it, philosophize on it, and then say, if you dare, that it has not been a very futile and foolish affair. Soldier, robber, priest, atheist, courtesan, virgin, I care not what you are, if you have not brought children into the world to suffer, your life has been as vain and as harmless as mine has been. I hold out my hand to you, we are brothers ; but in my heart of hearts I think myself a cut above you, because I do not believe in leaving the world better than I found it ; and you, exquisitely hypocritical reader, think that you are a cut above me because you say you would leave the world better than you found it. The one eternal and immutable delight of life is to think, for one reason or another, that we are better than our neighbours. This is why I wrote this book, and this is why it is affording you so much pleasure, O exquisitely hypocritical reader, my friend, my brother, because it helps you to the belief that you are not so bad after all. Now to resume.

The knell of my thirtieth year has sounded, in three or four years my youth will be as a faint haze on the sea, an illusive recollection ; so now while standing on the last verge of the hill, I will look back on the valley I lingered in. Do I regret ? I neither repent nor do I regret ; and a fool and a weakling I should be if I did. I know the worth and the rarity of more than ten years of systematic enjoyment. Nature provided me with as perfect a digestive apparatus, mental and physical, as she ever turned out of her workshop ; my stomach and brain are set in the most perfect equipoise possible to conceive, and up and down they went and still go with measured movement, absorbing and assimilating all that is poured into them without friction or stoppage. This book is a record of my mental digestions ; but it would take another series of confessions to tell of the dinners I have eaten, the champagne I have drunk ! and the suppers ! seven dozen of oysters, pâté de foie gras,

heaps of truffles, salad, and then a walk home in the early morning, a few philosophical reflections suggested by the appearance of a belated street-sweeper, then sleep, quiet and gentle sleep.

I have had the rarest, the finest friends. I have loved my friends; the rarest wits of my generation were my boon companions; everything conspired to enable me to gratify my body and my brain; and do you think this would have been so if I had been a good man? If you do you are a fool, good intentions and bald greed go to the wall, but subtle selfishness with a dash of unscrupulousness pulls more plums out of life's pie than the seven deadly virtues.* If you are a good man you want a bad one to convert; if you are a bad man you want a bad one to go out on the spree with. And you, my dear, my exquisite reader, place your hand upon your heart, tell the truth, remember this is a magical *tête-à-tête* which will happen never again in your life, admit that you feel just a little interested in my wickedness,† admit that if you ever thought you would like to know me it is because I know a good deal that you probably don't; admit that your mouth waters when you think of rich and various pleasures that fell to my share in happy Paris; admit that if this book had been an account of the pious books I had read, the churches I had been to, and the good works I had done, you would not have bought it or borrowed it. Hypocritical reader, think, had you had courage, health and money, to lead a fast life, would you not have done so? You don't know, no more do I; I have done so, and I regret nothing except that some farmers and miners will not pay me what they owe me and enable me to continue the life that was once mine, and of which I was so bright an ornament. How I hate this atrocious Strand lodging-house, how I long for my apartment in Rue de la Tour des Dames, with all its charming adjuncts, palms and pastels, my cat, my python, my friends, blond hair and dark.

*Vices, surely. *See* note, p. 168.

†Virtue.

The daily article soon grows monotonous, even when you know it will be printed, and this I did not know; my prose was very faulty, and my ideas were unsettled, I could not go to the tap and draw them off, the liquor was still fermenting; and partly because my articles were not very easily disposed of, and partly because I was weary of writing on different subjects. I turned my attention to short stories. But short stories did not represent my ambition.

There was the publisher in Catherine Street, who used to frequent a certain bar, and this worthy man conducted his business as he dressed himself, sloppily; a dear kind soul, quite witless and quite *h*-less. From long habit he would make a feeble attempt to drive a bargain, but he was duped generally. If a fashionable author asked two hundred pounds for a book out of which he would be certain to make three, it was ten to one that he would allow the chance to drift away from him; but after having refused a dozen times the work of a Strand loafer whom he was in the habit of "treating," he would say, "Send it in, my boy, send it in, I'll see what can be done with it." There was a long counter, and the way to be published by Mr. Tinsley was to straddle on the counter and play with a black cat. There was an Irishman behind this counter who, for three pounds a week, edited the magazine, read the MSS., looked after the printer and binder, kept the accounts and entertained the visitors; and instead of troubling Messrs. Macmillan and Messrs. Longman with polite requests to look at my MSS., I straddled, played with the cat, joked with the Irishman, drank with Mr. Tinsley, and in the natural order of things my stories went into the magazine and were paid for. Strange were the ways of this office; Shakespeare might have sent in prose and poetry, but he would have gone into the waste-paper basket had he not straddled. For those who were in the "know" this was a matter for congratulation; straddling we would cry, "We want no blooming outsiders coming along interfering with our magazine. And you, Smith, you devil, you had a twenty-

page story in last month and cut me out. O'Flanagan, do you mind if I send you in a couple of poems as well as my regular stuff, that will make it all square?" "I'll try to manage it; here's the governor." And looking exactly like the unfortunate Mr. Sedley, Mr. Tinsley used to slouch in and fall into his leather armchair, the one in which he wrote the cheques—the last time I saw that chair it was standing in the street in the hands of the brokers.

But conservative though we were in matters concerning "copy," though all means were taken to protect ourselves against interlopers, one who had not passed the preliminary stage of straddling would occasionally slip through our defences. One hot summer's day, we were all on the counter, our legs swinging, when an enormous young man entered. He must have been six feet three in height. He was shown into Mr. Tinsley's room, he asked him to read a MS., and he fled, looking very frightened. "Waste-paper basket, waste-paper basket," we shouted. "What an odd-looking fish he is—like a pike!" said O'Flanagan; "I wonder what his MS. is like?" "Very like a pike," we cried. But O'Flanagan took the MS. home to read, and returned next morning convinced he had discovered an embryo Dickens. The young man was asked to call, his book was accepted and we adjourned to the bar.

This young man took rooms in the house next to me on the ground floor. He had been to Oxford, and to Heidelberg, he drank beer and smoked long pipes, he talked of nothing but tobacco. Soon, very soon, I began to see that he thought me a simpleton; he pooh-poohed my belief in Naturalism and declined to discuss the symbolist question. He curled his long legs upon the rickety sofa and spoke of the British public as the "B.P.," and of the magazine as the "mag," and in the office which I had marked down as my own I saw him installed as a genius. He brought a little man about five feet three to live with him, and when the two, the long and the short, went out together, it was like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza

setting forth in quest of adventures in the land of Strand. The short man indulged in none of the loud, rasping affectation of humour that was so maddening in the long; he was dry, hard, and sterile, and when he did join in the conversation it was like a rotten nut between the teeth—dusty and bitter. He kept a pocket-book, in which he held an account of his reading. Holding the pocket-book between finger and thumb, he would say, "Last year I read ten plays by Nash, twelve by Peele, six by Greene, fifteen by Beaumont and Fletcher, and eleven anonymous plays—fifty-four in all."

CHAP. XVI

FORTUNATELY for my life and my sanity my interests were, about this time, attracted into other ways—ways that led into London life, and were suitable for me to tread. In a restaurant where low-necked dresses and evening clothes crushed with loud exclamations, where there was ever an odour of cigarette and brandy and soda, I was introduced to a Jew of whom I had heard much, a man who had newspapers and racehorses. The bright witty glances of his brown eyes at once prejudiced me in his favour, and it was not long before I knew that I had found another friend. His house was what was wanted, for it was so trenchant in character, so different from all I knew of, that I was forced to accept it, without likening it to any French memory and thereby weakening the impression. It was a house of champagne, late hours, and evening clothes, of literature and art, of passionate discussions. So this house was not so alien to me as all else I had seen in London; and perhaps the cosmopolitanism of this charming Jew, his Hellenism, in fact, was a sort of plank whereon I might pass and enter again into English life. I found in Curzon Street another Nouvelle Athènes, a Bohemianism of titles that went back to the Conquest, a Bohemianism of

the ten sovereigns always a-jingle in the trousers pocket, of scrupulous cleanliness, of hansom cabs, of ladies' pet names; of triumphant champagne, of debts, gaslight, supper-parties, morning light, coaching: a fabulous Bohemianism; a Bohemianism of eternal hardupishness and eternal squandering of money—money that rose at no discoverable well-head and flowed into a sea of boudoirs and restaurants, a sort of whirlpool of sovereigns in which we were caught, and sent eddying through music-halls, bright shoulders, tresses of hair, and slang; and I joined in the adorable game of Bohemianism that was played round and about Piccadilly Circus, with Curzon Street for a magnificent rallying-point.

After dinner a general "clear" was made in the direction of halls and theatres, a few friends would drop in about twelve, and continue their drinking till three or four; but Saturday night was gala night—at half past eleven the lords drove up in their hansoms, then a genius or two would arrive, and supper and singing went merrily until the chimney sweeps began to go by. Then we took chairs and bottles into the street and entered into discussion with the policeman. Twelve hours later we struggled out of our beds, and to the sound of church bells we commenced writing. The paper appeared on Tuesday. Our host sat in a small room off the dining-room from which he occasionally emerged to stimulate our lagging pens.

But I could not learn to see life paragraphically. I longed to give a personal shape to something, and personal shape could not be achieved in a paragraph nor in an article. True it is that I longed for art, but I longed also for fame, or was it notoriety? Both. I longed for fame, brutal and glaring.

Out with you, liars that you are, tell the truth, say you would sell the souls you don't believe in, or do believe in, for notoriety. I have known you attend funerals for the sake of seeing your miserable names in the paper! You, hypocritical reader, who are now turning up your eyes and murmuring "dreadful young man"—examine your weakly heart, and see

what divides us; I am not ashamed of my appetites, I proclaim them, what is more I gratify them; you're silent, you refrain, and you dress up natural sins in garments of shame, you would sell your wretched souls for what I would not give the parings of my finger-nails for—paragraphs in a society paper. I am ashamed of nothing I have done, especially my sins, and always boldly confess that I desired to make a noise in the world.

"Am I going to fail again as I have failed before?" I asked myself. "Will my novel prove as abortive as my paintings, my poetry, my journalism? We all want notoriety, our desire for notoriety is ugly, but it is less hideous when it is proclaimed from a brazen trumpet than when it lisps the cant of humanitarianism. Self, and after self a friend; the rest may go to the devil; and be sure that when any man is more vain and egotistic than his fellows, he will hide his head in humanitarianism. Victor Hugo was the stench and worms of humanitarianism: Mr. Swinburne holds his nose with one hand while he waves the censer with the other. All men of inferior genius, Victor Hugo and Mr. Gladstone, take refuge in humanitarianism. Humanitarianism is a pigsty, where liars, hypocrites, and the obscene in spirit congregate; it has been so since the great Jew conceived it, and it will be so till the end. Far better the blithe modern pagan in his white tie and evening clothes, and his facile philosophy. He says, "I don't care how the poor live; my only regret is that they live at all"; and he gives the beggar a shilling.

We all want notoriety; our desires on this point, as upon others, are not noble, but the human is very despicable vermin and only tolerable when it tends to the brute, and away from the evangelical. I will tell you an anecdote which is in itself an admirable illustration of my craving for notoriety; and my anecdote will serve a double purpose—it will bring me some of the notoriety of which I am so desirous, for you, dear, exquisitely hypocritical reader, will at once cry, "Shame!

Could a man be so wicked as to attempt to force on a duel, so that he might make himself known through the medium of a legal murder?" You will tell your friends of this horrible unprincipled young man, and they will, of course, instantly want to know more about him.

It was a gala night in Curzon Street, the lords were driving up in hansoms; some seated on the roofs with their legs swinging inside; the comics had arrived from the halls; there were ladies, many ladies; choruses were going merrily in the drawing-room; one man was attempting to kick the chandelier, another stood on his head on the sofa. There was a beautiful young lord there, that sort of figure that no woman can resist. There was a delightful youth who seemed inclined to empty the mustard-pot down my neck; him I could keep in order, but the beautiful lord was attempting to make a butt of me. With his impertinences I did not for a moment intend to put up; I did not know him, he was not then, as he is now, if he will allow me to say so, a friend. The ladies retired about then; and the festivities continued. We had passed through various stages of jubilation, no one was drunk, but we had been jocose and rowdy, we had told stories of all kinds. The young lord and I did not "pull well together," but nothing decidedly unpleasant occurred until someone proposed to drink to the downfall of Gladstone. The beautiful lord got on his legs and began a speech. Politically it was sound enough, but much of it was plainly intended to turn me into ridicule. I answered sharply, working gradually up crescendo, until at last, to bring matters to a head, I said,

"I don't agree with you; the Land Act of '81 was a necessity."

"Anyone who thinks so must be a fool."

"Very possibly, but I don't allow people to address such language to me, and you must be aware that to call anyone a fool, sitting with you at table in the house of a friend, is the act of a cad."

There was a lull, then a moment after he said,

" I only meant politically."

" And I only meant socially."

He advanced a step or two and struck me across the face with his finger-tips; I took up a champagne bottle, and struck him across the head and shoulders. Different parties of revellers kept us apart, and we walked up and down on either side of the table swearing at each other. Although I was very wroth, I had had a certain consciousness from the first that if I played my cards well I might come very well out of the quarrel; and as I walked down the street I determined to make every effort to force on a meeting. If the quarrel had been with one of the music-hall singers I should have backed out of it, but I had everything to gain by pressing it. I grasped the situation at once. All the Liberal Press would be on my side, the Conservative Press would have nothing to say against me, no woman in it and a duel with a lord would be nuts and apples for the journalists.

I did not go to bed at once, but sat in the armchair thinking, calculating my chances. A cab came rattling up to the door, and one of the revellers came upstairs. He told me that everything had been arranged; I told him that I was not in the habit of allowing others to arrange my affairs for me, and went to bed.

Among my old friends I could think of some half-dozen that would suit me perfectly, but where were they? Ten years' absence scatters friends as October scatters swallows.

The first one said, "it was about one or two in the morning?"

" Later than that, it was about seven."

" He struck you, and not very hard, I should imagine; you hit him with a champagne bottle, and now you want to have him out."

" I did not come here to listen to moral reflections; if you don't like to act for me, say so."

I telegraphed to Warwickshire to an old friend:—" Can I count on you to act for me in an affair of honour?"

Two or three hours after the reply came: "Come down here and stay with me for a few days, we'll talk it over." English people, I said, will have nothing to do with serious duelling. I must telegraph to Marshall. "Of all importance. Come over at once and act for me in an affair of honour. Bring the Count with you; leave him at Boulogne; he knows the colonel of the ——." The next day I received the following. "Am burying my father; as soon as he is underground will come." Was there ever such ill luck? . . . He won't be here before the end of the week. These things demand the utmost promptitude. Three or four days afterwards Emma told me a gentleman was upstairs taking a bath. "Hollo, Marshall, how are you? Had a good crossing? The poor old gentleman went off quite suddenly, I suppose?"

"Yes; found dead in his bed. He must have known he was dying, for he lay quite straight as the dead lie, his hands by his side . . . wonderful presence of mind."

"He left no money?"

"Not a penny; but I could manage it all right. Since my success at the Salon, I have been able to sell my things. I am only beginning to find out now what a success that picture was. *Je t'assure, je fais école*" . . .

"*Tu crois ça . . . on fait école après vingt ans de travail.*"

When we were excited Marshall and I always dropped into French.

"And now tell me," he said, "about this duel."

No sooner had I begun to tell the story than it dawned upon me that it was impossible to tell it seriously; it was fundamentally an absurd story; and I lacked courage to tell Marshall that I looked upon the duel as a way to notoriety. The most courageous will shrink from admitting such a weakness, and, moreover, if it were admitted, Marshall might refuse to act for me; nor were my fears altogether groundless, for I had not related the whole story when Marshall interrupted me with the suggestion that he did not think the matter serious enough to necessitate a journey to Flanders.

On seeing my face change expression, he added, to propitiate me, that if he saw any reluctance on the part of Lord ——'s seconds to apologize he would, of course, insist that reparation was due to me. He had no sooner spoken than I began to doubt the possibility of a bloody issue to my quarrel, and somewhat helplessly asked Marshall if he would care to go to the theatre. After the theatre we went home and æstheticized till the duel became the least important event and Marshall's new picture the greatest. At breakfast next day the duel seemed more tiresome than ever, but the gentlemen were coming to meet Marshall. He showed his usual tact in arranging my affair of honour; a letter was drawn up in which my friend withdrew the blow of his hand, I withdrew the blow of the bottle, etc.—really now I lack energy to explain it any further.

CHAP. XVII

Hypocritical reader, you draw your purity garments round you, you say, "How very base"; but I say unto you, remember how often you have longed, if you are a soldier in Her Majesty's army, for war—war that would bring every form of sorrow to a million fellow-creatures, and you longed for all this to happen, because it might bring your name into the *Gazette*. Hypocritical reader, think not too hardly of me; hypocritical reader, think what you like of me, your hypocrisy will alter nothing; in telling you of my vices I am only telling you of your own; hypocritical reader, in showing you my soul I am showing you your own; hypocritical reader, exquisitely hypocritical reader, you are my brother, I salute you.

Day passed over day, and my novel seemed an impossible task—defeat glared at me from every corner of the room. My English was so bad, so thin—stupid colloquialisms out of joint with French idiom. I learnt unusual words and stuck

them up here and there ; they did not mend the style Self-reliance had been lost in past failures ; I was weighed down on every side, but I struggled to bring the book somehow to a close. Nothing mattered to me, but this one thing. To put an end to the landlady's cheating, and to bind myself to remain at home, I entered into an arrangement with her that she was to supply me with board and lodgings for three pounds a week, and henceforth resisting all Curzon Street temptations, I trudged home to eat a chop. I studied the servant as one might an insect under a microscope. "What an admirable book she would make, but what will the end be? if I only knew the end!"

I saw poor Miss L—— nightly on the stairs, and I never wearied of talking to her of her hopes and ambitions, of the young man she admired, and she used to ask me about my novel.

When my troubles lay too heavily upon me, I let her go up to her garret without a word, and remained at the window wondering if I should ever escape from Cecil Street, if I should ever be a light in that London, long, low, misshapen, that dark monumented stream flowing through the lean bridges. What if I were a light in this umber-coloured mass? Happiness abides only in the natural affections—in a home and a sweet wife. Would she whom I saw to-night marry me? How sweet she was in her simple naturalness, the joys she has known have been slight and pure, not violent and complex as mine. Ah, she is not for me, I am not fit for her, I am too sullied for her lips. Were I to win her could I be dutiful, true? . . .

CHAP. XVIII

"Young men, young men whom I love, dear ones who have rejoiced with me, not the least of our pleasures is the virtuous woman ; after excesses there is reaction, all things are good

in nature, and they are foolish young men who think that sin alone should be sought for. The feast is over for me, I have eaten and drunk: I yield my place, do you eat and drink as I have; do you be young as I was. I have written it! The word is not worth erasure, if it is not true to-day it will be two years hence; farewell! I yield my place, do you be young as I was, do you love youth as I did; you are the most interesting beings under heaven, for you all sacrifices will be made, you will be fêted and adored upon the condition of remaining young men. The feast is over for me, I yield my place, but I will not make this leave-taking more sorrowful than it is already by afflicting you with advice and instruction how to obtain what I have obtained. I have spoken against education, and will not strive to educate you, you will educate yourselves. Dear ones, dear ones, the world is your pleasure; use it at your will. Dear ones, I see you all about me still, I yield my place; but one more glass I will drink with you; and while drinking I would say my last word—were it possible I would be remembered by you as a young man: but I know too well that the young never realize that the old were not born old. Farewell."

The cold air of morning blew in my face, forcing me to close the window; and sitting at the table, overworn and not a little haggard, I continued my novel.

MUMMER-WORSHIP

An actor is one who repeats a portion of a story invented by another. You can teach a child to act, but you can teach no child to paint pictures, to model statues, or to write prose, poetry, or music; acting is therefore the lowest of the arts, if it is an art at all, and makes slender demands on the intelligence of the individual exercising it; but this age, being one mainly concerned with facile amusement and parade, reverences the actor above all other beings, and has, by some prodigy that cannot be explained by us, succeeded, or almost succeeded, in abstracting him from the playwright, upon whom he should feed in the manner of a parasite, and endowing him with a separate existence—of necessity ephemeral, but which by dint of gaudy upholstery and various millinery has been prolonged beyond due limits and still continues. We of the nineteenth century have witnessed this, and things even stranger and more wonderful, and we bear testimony to them. For according to ancient books and traditions, the actor and actress of past times—those times when Congreve and Wycherley lived—may be compared to a careless lad and wench who, having tired of the ties of home and ways of respectability, threw off galling restraint and roved, after their own hearts' fashion, on the outskirts of society, telling poetry to the joyous who, like them, cared little for beads, ashes and repentance. Such manner of dramatic life found favour up to the close of the last century and did not fall into complete desuetude until about twenty years ago. Then a great and drastic change came; the mummer grew ashamed of his hose and longed for a silk hat, a villa, and above all a visit from the parson. Nothing is more touching than the shame that suddenly came upon mummers, male and female; and now, in full fig, that is to say in a villa, in a silk hat, and

with the cards of the parson and his wife in their hands, they lay claim to our sympathies and demand our household affections. Their women assure us that they are excellent mothers and have not known the joys of lovers ; the men invite us to their club, and speak of aristocratic connections. So the mummer has changed his garb and name ; he is now the actor, and wears a silk hat. Can the leopard change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin ? The modern mummer sits on the lawn outside his villa in St. John's Wood ; his boys are educated at Eton ; his wife, a portly lady on the verge of forty-five and society, tells her visitors of the many acts of Christian charity she is performing and of the luncheon-parties to which she has been asked. The mummer's house is full of letters from eminent people, cuttings from newspapers, and portraits of himself and his wife, for as he was civilized (up or down, which is it ?), his vanity has grown as weed never grew before : it overtops all things human, and puts forth religious blossom.

Genius and respectability for the actor, genius and virtue for the actress, is the cry from the modern stage. Grant us this and we'll be still. " Why shouldn't a girl be virtuous on stage as well as elsewhere . . . and a great deal more so too ? " cries the young actress. And the young lady's aphorism finds echo in the newspapers. It would be vain to seek for the John and Paul of the new gospel. So numerous are they that their individualities have been lost, and suffice it for the purpose of this article to say, its apostles are everywhere. The Word is preached, miracles are recorded, and in that Jordan, the Roman Church, the black are made white, and turned bleating into society's fold. Every day the strength of the movement calls new preachers into existence, and we must needs seek sermons in skirts and prayer in the wings. Five years have not passed since we heard for the first time that a favourite actress nursed her children, read prayers, and gave tea and tracts to naughty chorus girls A favourite American actress has improved upon the Englishwoman's initiative, inasmuch as the details concerning her private life

which are offered for our delectation are of a more refined nature. When the first rumour of her refusal of the duke's hand had been adequately contradicted, we were informed that she went to church every Sunday, and lived a holy and retired life with her mother, and latterly it has transpired that she will never marry : virtue is not enough for this young lady, she must have the sacredness of the vestal ; and so a corner-stone of the convent has been added to the Church of the Drama. And as a Lyceum tragedy is burlesqued at the Gaiety, so did *danseuses* and others burlesque the moral tone that came from Wellington Street, and we have had to listen to persistent asseverations of virtue from notorious "professional" ladies who accept presents of jewellery and sup with the young dogs of the town. The trade in stage virtue waxes fast and furious and it seems not unlikely that signs of it will soon be put over theatrical doors.

Mummers interrupt our path in life—their virtue, their beauty, their successes, their books—for lately they have taken to writing books ; books about what? about themselves. There is but one subject of interest to the mummer, and, like his clothes, his talk, and his virtue, his books excite the curiosity of the public. We have had five editions of the Bancroft "Memoirs"—two bulky volumes of five hundred pages each. Mr. Toole's "Memoirs" are promised, Mr. Grossmith's* have appeared, and Mr. Corney Grain's are announced ; and the daily press, letting pass the rarest prose and verse without a word (I believe no notice appeared of Mr. Pater's "Imaginary Portraits" in the *Telegraph*, the *Standard*, or the *Chronicle*), eagerly gives up dozens of columns to praise and quotation of the stupid anecdotes that anyone who has held or played in a theatre chooses to write out. And when not engaged in compiling the stories of their virtuous and successful lives, the mummers discuss their social grievances in the evening papers. What is the social status

* "A Society Clown," by George Grossmith.

of the actor? is argued as passionately as a frontier question of European importance. Mr. Grossmith writes to the duke, before he consents to accept ten pounds to sing a couple of songs, to ask if he will be received as a guest. . . . Or was it that the duke wrote to Mr. Grossmith and asked how he would like to be received? Be this as it may, something went wrong, and Mr. Grossmith declares that he scored over the duke by taking a countess down to supper. Neither doctors, lawyers, nor dentists stipulate how they are to be received when they attend. And it will seem to many that when a gentleman accepts a fee for singing in a drawing-room he would prove his blue blood better by declining to consider himself in the light of an ordinary guest than by afterwards discussing his claim to be received on an equal footing with those whose presence was not paid for. It would also be well if, on retiring from the stage and entering society, actresses would refrain a little, not criticize too severely the morals of the ladies around them, and not wonder in stage whispers why Mrs. So-and-so is received.

I know how easily the present may be depreciated by comparing it with a past that time has hallowed and the imagination must needs idealize, knowing it only in its noblest aspects; but facile, common, and unjust as the expedient generally is, it seems to me impossible to consider the state of our drawing-rooms without glancing at those that preceded them. I will attempt no description of an eighteenth-century *salon*—a mention of Mr. Orchardson's picture will bring my reader's thoughts to the desired point. Such representation of the eighteenth century, even when we have exaggerated what time has taken of ugliness, and allowed for what the imagination lends of beauty, must be admitted as proof that our manners have declined out of all reckoning. We should have looked in vain for mummers in the *salon* of Madame Récamier, and it is to the honour of ladies of old time that we do not find them ostentatiously love-making with inferiors. Love then spread his wings in court phrase and political intrigue;

now he is a vulgar parrot that speaks by rote and screams before the footlights. He who thinks society has lost nothing of dignity and elegance must call to mind Mr. Orchardson's picture as he walks into a London drawing-room. Here is a specimen of a modern *salon* in a fashionable house where the mummer has gained a footing. Look with me at the company. First, some young Jews whose long locks do not conceal their Whitechapel origin. One is at the piano. The eyes of many middle-aged ladies are fixed on him ; he ogles them in turn ; on his especial patrons he lets a single glance fall ; he strikes a chord with his right hand ; he lets his left drop by his side and utters the last note. The song is done, the middle-aged ladies remove their eyes and sigh with admiration. His place is taken by a girl of wild and unsettled look. Her dress is loud, her hair is perhaps touched with dye ; she plays and sings, acts and recites, and is said to make a great deal of money. She is always engaged to a young mummer, and she is now playing the accompaniment for her future husband. Like the others, he is exceedingly lovely, and everywhere you hear of his loveliness. When he gives a concert the hall is filled with women mute with delight or talking incoherently. Will anyone assert that this is not true, and, being true, that it is not decadence ? The individual standing in the doorway left the army some years ago ; there is still a look of the officer in his mild face—a face made mild by long association with folly, vanity, and caprice. As usual, he is waiting for his wife ; as usual, she stands at a little distance in the middle of the room, talking of herself. She explains that she is a popular favourite, and how, in the event of not getting an engagement, she will give another *matinée*. How much money has the poor man spent on *matinées*, on tours, on seasons at the Opéra Comique, the Globe, the Olympic, the Strand ? There are always people in his house, principally dramatic authors—unkempt dramatic authors from the Strand ; erudite and melancholy dramatic authors from Oxford ; foolish and foppish dramatic

authors from Mayfair. They read plays after breakfast, after lunch, and after dinner, and the readings are only interrupted by fashionable men who come from the clubs and make up parties to go to the theatre. The poor husband sits on the stairs with his only child on his knees ; the child says, "When will mother come home, father ?" The elderly man who sits talking to an old lady was stricken in early life with a hatred of dressing for dinner and afternoon calls, and to escape from what he hated, he lived with an actress. His social experiment succeeded for a time, but as society became disorganized the lady succeeded in scrambling through some unguarded loopholes, and when she married her protector she determined to make up for lost time. No more loose jackets ; no more smoking in the drawing-room ; no more Bohemian friends, but society select and rare ; and the little man has now to take in double doses what he hated—afternoon calls and formal conversations. He is not only obliged to dress every day for dinner, but he has to give entertainments in the open air—they give him violent colds ; afternoon calls interfere with politics, but every day you can see him crumpled up in his wife's vast carriage. The horses step out, her bosom stretches forth, and away they go to leave cards. Deluded little politician ! Had he married a lady he would have escaped with half his present visiting, and might have been allowed to dispense occasionally with evening dress.

In the *salons* of the eighteenth century love was interwoven between literature and politics. Now our love passages twine round a criticism of acting—how So-and-so used to play the part walking up the stage with his hands in his pockets, whereas So-and-so used to play the part walking down the stage with his hands behind his back. "I want you," says the actor to his lady, "to come to the theatre to-night, for I have invented a new bit of 'business'; while So-and-so is singing his sentimental song I pretend to have lost my tobacco pouch, and so that the public shan't get tired of it I intend to vary the 'business' next week by pretending that I have

got a pebble in my shoe." Over such points the season goes mad, falls prostrate and licks the boots of mummerdom. Every prostration has been performed, every servile contortion has been made; and these changed creatures, with hymn-books in their hands and their pinchbeck virtue oozing through their speech, come up every staircase shaking the dust of their past careers from their garments.

For the last ten years the actor has not only demanded acclamation for what he does, but he has striven to obtain, and has succeeded in obtaining, praise for what he is, thus emulating all priests and sacred apes. He demands more than they: by right of his office he claims intelligence as his inalienable right. Even priests and sacred apes have refrained from this last audacity. When I say the actor claims intelligence, even genius, by right of his office, I do not mean that the claim has ever been put into writing—in the form of a deposition read before the Lord Mayor, who will listen to depositions on all subjects—but by his attitude of late years the actor has not only made, but has maintained, his right to genius. Not only all he asked has been conceded, but he has been encouraged to come again and ask for more.

I pass without comment the banquets that have been given to him on leaving for America, of the inordinate use made of the telegraph-wire in proclaiming his victories; it would hardly be to the point to speak of the reporters who go to his ship when the anchor-chain has run out, write of his health and his impressions in endless columns, and style him "great chief." Let all this be waived. So many have been treated in this way, that such consideration and recognition is valued little by them. So Mr. Wyndham must have thought when he planned his continental tour. "America, what is it? At best a land of dollars. I will go where there are Emperors—to Russia and Germany."

Our contention is a threefold one; first, that acting is the lowest of the arts, if it be an art at all; secondly, that the public has almost ceased to discriminate between bad and

good acting, and will readily grant its suffrage and applause to anyone who has been abundantly advertised, and can enforce his or her claim either by beauty or rank ; thirdly, that the actor is applauded not for what he does, but for what he is—that of late years the actor has been lifted out of his place, and that, in common with all things when out of their places, he is ridiculous and blocks the way. A plain account of Mr. Wyndham's continental tour will fully prove these three indictments. Mr. Wyndham is an actor who has played very well indeed in numberless adaptations of French farces, and his plea for seeking the suffrages of Emperors is that he was at school in Germany, and knows French as an educated Englishman knows it. Miss Mary Moore (the "leading lady" at the Criterion Theatre) tells the story of her qualifications for the tour in question in the *Evening News* of March 24th ; and it is worthy of repetition here, if only to show the slight preparation and training which are now necessary to gain a footing on the "boards."

"Well, I began my stage career at Bradford, in Yorkshire, in the first touring company of *The Candidate*, sent out by Mr. Wyndham. I went out as understudy of Miss Eveson in the leading part of 'Lady Dorothy.' At Bradford Miss Eveson was taken ill, and I had to go on at very short notice. I need not tell you how dreadfully nervous I was. It was a very severe trial, but I managed to get through it. *It was actually my first appearance on any stage. I had no previous experience, even as an amateur.*"

The italics are mine ; I would ask those who think I have unjustly depreciated the art of acting in comparison with the other arts, to think if they can of a man painting a picture without "previous experience," or modelling a statue, or composing a sonata, or even playing a piano.

"When Miss Eveson returned to London I continued with *The Candidate* company, playing the leading part all through the tour. . . . My first appearance in London was at the Criterion Theatre, in October, 1885. . . . One day I received

a cablegram from Mr. Wyndham, asking me whether I would play ' Ada Ingot ' in German at Berlin in October. It was a startling proposal, for we were already in the latter part of August, and I had never kept up my familiarity with the German language since my school-days. But I made up my mind to do it if it were at all possible. . . . *In order to get as much practice as possible in the foreign tongue in which I had somewhat rashly undertaken to play, I took my passage in the North German Lloyd steamer ' Saal.'* "

The touching simplicity of this confession deserves italics. A new amateur goes to Germany and Russia to play in German and French, neither of which she is more than superficially acquainted with.

Only those who have lived ten years abroad and speak a foreign language with fluency and conversational correctness, and therefore know how skin-deep their knowledge of the language is, may appreciate at its full value the exquisite absurdities that this very English couple must have been guilty of. The newspapers told us that they were applauded and received floral tributes, but so would a band of Hottentots who came to Europe to flourish clubs ; and no doubt Mr Wyndham and Miss Mary Moore will be applauded and will receive floral tributes if they go to Paris and play there in Russian ; and I would advise them to do this, for Russia is all the fashion in Paris. The Parisians will nod their heads and say, *Que c'est charmant . . . quelle jolie langue . . . harmonieuse*, etc. But to return to their German tour. Telegrams came from Berlin, Frankfort, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, announcing Mr. Wyndham's and Miss Mary Moore's triumphant success. Evidently the passage in the North German steamer bore fruit, and I can imagine them preparing their French by engaging ticket-collectors in discussion. When they returned home there was more banqueting and more floral tributes, and for a big bomb the Chancellor of the Exchequer was invited to supper on the stage of the Criterion Theatre, and he made a speech. I regret that I cannot

lay hands on a verbatim report, but, in default, I give some lines of a description of it which appeared in the *Era* :

" Mr. Charles Wyndham will need all his natural modesty to prevent his becoming intoxicated by his recent achievements. It was much to carry the flag of the British drama to Berlin ; it was more to win the admiration of Russian royalty ; but to get Mr. Goschen to bear eloquent tribute to the actor's merits was, indeed, something remarkable. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is, as everybody knows, the embodiment of the practical. Stern, shrewd common sense has always been his most striking characteristic. To find him the sympathetic and admiring laudator of the buoyant and volatile actor-manager who has recently returned to the Criterion Theatre with all his blushing honours thick upon him is, indeed, as Mr. Coburn would say, ' a surprise.' Mr. Wyndham has, indeed, been curiously fortunate in his connection with political magnates. It was at the Criterion Theatre, it will be remembered, that Mr. Gladstone sat on the very evening when the fall of Khartoum was announced. Much political capital was made out of the circumstance ; and both parties had reason to be grateful to *The Candidate* on this occasion. The Liberals must have been thankful for the much-needed relaxation afforded to their sorely harassed chief, whilst the Conservatives did not fail to make a vast amount of political capital out of the coincidence, comparing ' the grand old man ' to Nero fiddling whilst Rome was in flames, with other pleasant parallels of a similar nature. And now a Chancellor of the Exchequer holds forth in polished terms at a banquet on the very Criterion stage, and sings the praises of the British drama of the day. Mr. Goschen's knowledge of German theatrical taste enabled him confidently to pay a tribute to the reality of Mr. Wyndham's success. After a pun, that Mr. Toole might have envied, about ' Garrick on the Spree,' Mr. Goschen went on to say that a new form of British competition was being carried into the heart of the German Empire. It was said, remarked Mr. Goschen, that the Germans were pushing

us hard in many directions; they were said to be depriving us of a portion of our trade; they were said to be our most formidable rivals in all quarters of the globe; but though German men-o'-war might plant the German flag in the Navigator Islands, Mr. Wyndham had planted the Union Jack of Old England on the Court Theatre of Berlin. People had talked about the Pendjeh incident; but what was such an incident compared with the incident of *David Garrick* acted on a Moscow stage? 'The Germans,' continuéd the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 'have long admired, with proper reverence, the splendid works of our great dramatists; but till lately they scorned the efforts of those who endeavoured to render them on the stage.' "

C'est gigantesque, as Flaubert used to say when some more than natural enormity of the *bourgeoisie* was brought under his notice. But we will not draw attention to any particular sentence, either by italicization or comment; each is a flawless gem of the rarest human stupidity, and the whole forms the most perfect and complete diadem of nineteenth-century sottishness that we can call to mind.

It would seem therefore that our contention, namely, that our century delights more in parade and gross satisfactions than the centuries that immediately preceded it, and therefore accords worship to the mummer, less for what he does than by right of his mummerhood, is not a light paradox founded on fancy, but a solid truth resting on a substantial basis of fact.

Cruelty was the vice of the ancient, vanity is that of the modern world. Vanity is the last disease. To-day we all seek admiration—that is to say, admiration in its original sense of wonderment. It matters not at all to us if we obtain approbation—instinctively we eschew it, fearing all that might tend to diminish the sentiment of wonder which we eagerly strive to create. The stage therefore catches the great part of the attention of modern society. Painting, music, and poetry demand special talents—ability is required to compose

even a bad opera, a bad epic, a bad picture—but anyone can play Juliet and Hamlet badly ; besides, to compose even bad operas, epics, and pictures, solitude and long concentration of thought are needed, and with solitude and long concentration of thought the young ladies and young men of to-day will have nothing to do. Desiring parade and wonderment, they turn their eyes to the stage. Our generation has ceased to care for work ; we all want to live well, to enjoy life. In the lowest as well as the highest I note the same desire. Twenty years ago farm labourers were paid by the piece and they worked on till eight o'clock in the evening ; now they are paid by the week and they strike work at half past five. This general inclination to take pleasure and ease is of course more acutely marked in society than in the fields. Young sons shrink from the counting-house and shudder when Manitoba is mentioned. The arts offer them a pretext for remaining at home. So the arts are encumbered with young men and women. The most intelligent and the least carnal go to literature, painting, sculpture, and music ; the stupid, the vain, and the fleshly go to the stage. Not in vocation and original impulse must we seek the reason of the thousands of pictures that yearly line the walls of the public galleries and the piles of novels that crowd the stalls of the booksellers, but in vanity and idleness ; and the dull-witted, uneducated, over-dressed young men who speak of being on or of going on the stage in Kensington and Bayswater drawing-rooms, are too cowardly to enlist, too lazy to face the hardships of colonial life. They would pull plums out of the mummer's pie, but they will not go into the kitchen where it is made and baked. . . . The profession must be raised, elevated, etc. If I except a couple of princesses and a duchess in perspective, I know no young lady who has not at one time or other expressed a regret that she was not an actress. Women are quite as foolish and quite as vain as men —which is saying a great deal—and they desire the stage for the same reason as their brothers. But for the young ladies there is at least an excuse : now that we have a surplus female

population it is clear that all women cannot marry, they cannot enlist, nor yet go out to the colonies and become domestic servants. So they sigh after the stage. "What are we to do with our daughters?" is a vital question. The young ladies cry in chorus, "Put us on the stage, mamma"; but mamma still hesitates, and the question is debated: "Can Ethel, Harriet, and May sing in the chorus—not in Mr. Farnie's operas, but in Mr. Gilbert's—and remain as good and pure young ladies as if they had continued to do crochet-work in the drawing-room at home?" The parents oppose for a while their daughters' wishes, but in their heart of hearts they think it would be no bad thing if Ethel, Harriet, and May were to earn each thirty shillings or two pounds a week. Such is the "psychological moment" in Kensington and Bayswater, and out of it come all the various hypocrisy, subterfuge, and sophistry which we may read under such headings as "Church and Stage," "Social Status of the Actor," etc.

Ethel, Harriet, and May take lessons in elocution. They assure their parents that to be taught to read Shakespeare by Mrs. A. is just the same as to be taught to dance by Mrs. B. At Mrs. A.'s they make acquaintances, they invite their new friends to come to their house, or they go to their new friends' houses, where they make more acquaintances, all more or less connected with the drama. If they are lucky, Ethel, Harriet, and May are engaged at small salaries as understudies. They leave home at eleven in the morning for rehearsal, and they spend several hours wandering about in the twilight of the stage, or sitting in the darkness of the wings. There are the dangers of familiarity. The stage-manager calls them "dear," puts his arm round their shoulders, and walks across the stage with them; and he is a bullying, blaspheming fellow when he is at work, a coaxing, sensual fellow when he is idling. "And how is she to-day?" he asks Ethel. The young girl rebukes him, but she is laughed at by her companions and told she is ruining her chances. Harriet may feel

faint: if so, she is led out into the air by the young man standing next her, and he presses her to drink a glass of wine. At rehearsal the formality of introductions is dispensed with. A friend of the manager arranges a lunch, and if our young ladies refuse the invitations so graciously extended to them they are looked upon with suspicion in the theatre. Bouquets and presents are left for them at the stage-door. In the dressing-rooms they meet all sorts and conditions of girls; they have to dress in their company; they have to listen to their conversation, which is often sometimes more than a trifle coarse. They have not been on the stage a month, and already into what shadow has not home faded, with its familiar restraints, associations and influences! At the end of the season, Ethel, Harriet, and May go on tour. They are friendless, they are lonely and a little afraid; and the instinct is inherent in woman to look to man for love and protection. Now a long railway journey, passed amid enervating conversations and card-playing, is over; the girl is tired; there is a rush for lodgings. "Come along, my dear," cries one of the principals; "I'm going to the 'Hen and Chickens'; you'll be able to get a room there." She spends months with this man for sole companion, sometimes living under the same roof with him. After having "knocked around" for ten years, and danced and sung in long clothes and short, and been loved much and often, Ethel returns to London, where she is sometimes engaged to play small parts at a salary of five pounds a week. Harriet married an actor; she is now divorced. May ran away with a banker, who promised to marry her, but didn't; she went to America; she tried to "get" on the stage again; now she is drinking herself to death. And as I have sketched it, so might the fate be of three young ladies taken from a Bayswater drawing-room, and turned into the dramatic profession to make their living; I mean three average young ladies who, meaning to be good girls, might turn to the stage for the usual reasons—vanity, weariness of home, and ordinary love of change. I do not say adventure:

grant love of adventure, and you draw perilously near vocation. The young lady who, wild with love of adventure and masquerade, beats her wings against the plate-glass window of her prison, and looks to the dark doorway as the lark to the bright sky, will possibly fight her way to the front. Nature has chosen her for the battle of the footlights. The ranks of the chorus will be better filled by those who enlist out of inclination than by those who have been led by false promises out of their way of life.

Far less than art or government is a philosophic idea understood ; but how much suffering might be avoided if the truth could become generally recognized and acted upon, that no world can be wholly pure or impure—that some proportion of vice, as well as virtue, must find its way into human life ! The entire removal and abolition of either would mean death to the race. Mr. Lecky, in a magnificently eloquent passage, inspired by a profound philosophy, has described the harlot as the guardian angel of our wives and daughters. Our every-day moralists would do well to master such primary truths before they seek to subvert entirely the present order of vice and virtue.

The stage was once a profession for the restless, the frankly vicious—for those who sought any escape from the platitude of their personality ; the stage is now a means of enabling the refuse of society to satisfy the flesh, and air much miserable vanity. Such change has come. No change is more than superficial, and dramatic art has not risen above the law that governs human things. To-day the stage is as moral as it was a hundred years ago—as much so and not one jot more. The alliance between church and stage is a subject wherewith the hypocritical may trade on the eternal credulity of mankind ; the alliance between the stage and society is unfortunately a reality, and I have attempted to explain its genesis. The dramatic profession has been, is, and always must be, a profession for those to whom social restraints are irksome, and who would lead the life their instinct dictates. The ideal

mother cannot be the great artist. The ancients knew this well, and did not waste time in striving to unite the cradle and the *chef-d'œuvre*. And since, in the eternal wisdom of things, we must find a place for vice as well as for virtue, for the Bohemian as well as the housewife, I believe that little will be gained by emptying the *coulisse* into the drawing-room, and the drawing-room into the *coulisse*. We have no belief in the amalgamation of classes, and still hold by the old distinctions. We do not prefer vice to virtue, or virtue to vice, but believe both, since both exist, to be necessary; and our morality consists mainly in striving to keep them apart and refraining from experimental mixing. Victor Hugo in his last book, "Choses Vues," has a chapter entitled "Mlle. Georges." The great actress comes to see him in a moment of great distress, and he records her conversation:

"Voilà la vérité. Je suis dans la misère. J'ai pris mon courage et je suis allée chez Rachel, chez Mlle. Rachel, pour lui demander de jouer *Rodogune* avec moi à mon bénéfice. Elle ne m'a pas reçue, et m'a fait dire de lui écrire. Oh! par exemple, non! Je ne suis pas encore là. Je suis reine de théâtre comme elle, j'ai été une belle catin comme elle, et elle sera un jour une vieille pauvresse comme moi. Eh bien, je ne lui écrirai pas. Je ne lui demande pas l'aumône. Je ne ferai pas l'antichambre chez cette drôlesse! Mais elle ne se souvient pas qu'elle a été mendiante! Elle ne songe pas qu'elle le deviendra! Mendiante dans les cafés, M. Hugo; elle chantait et on lui jettait deux sous! C'est bon. Dans ce moment-ci elle joue chez Véron à un louis et elle gagne ou perd dix mille francs dans la nuit; mais dans trente ans elle n'aura pas deux liards et elle ira dans la crotte avec des souliers éculés! Dans trente ans elle ne s'appellera. peut-être pas Rachel aussi bien que je m'appelle Georges. Elle trouvera une gamine qui aura du talent et qui lui marchera sur la tête et elle se couchera à plat ventre, voyez-vous. . . . Je dois dix francs à mon portier. J'ai été obligée de laisser vendre au Mont-de-Piété les boutons de diamant que je tenais de

l'empereur. Je joue au théâtre Saint-Marcel, je joue aux Batignolles, je joue à la banlieue, je n'ai pas vingt-cinq sous pour payer mon fiacre. Et bien, non, je n'écrirai pas à Rachel, et je me jetterai à l'eau tout bonnement."

This seems to me truth—truth for yesterday, for to-day, and for all time. Hypocrites will write about the church and stage, and new devotees will fall before a single shrine of shovel-hattedness and motley ; young ladies will think more than ever that the stage-door will lead them from the irksomeness of *chaperons* to fame and fortune, and Kensington matrons will incline a more and more docile ear to that which they are now seeking to believe—that their daughters may be virtuous actresses ; the flame of mummer-worship will be blown higher ; society will embrace the mummer, the mummer will return the embrace more ardently ; we shall hear of another queen of the boards who nurses her children, and another who goes to church every Sunday ; many strange things will come to pass, but such phases of stage-life are ephemeral and circumstantial—gnats on the surface of a well, and in the end the abiding and important truth will be found unchanged at the bottom ; and I have not found it more strikingly expressed than in the words of the unfortunate Mlle. Georges.

A VISIT TO MÉDAN

I

Manet had persuaded me to go to the *bal de l'Assommoir* dressed as a Parisian workman, for he enjoyed incongruities, and the blouse and the casquette, with my appearance and my accent, appealed to his imagination. "There is no Frenchman living in London who occupies the same position as you do in Paris," he said, and I pondered over his words as I followed him through *tout Paris* assembled at the Elysée Montmartre, for the ball given in honour of the play that was being performed at the Ambigu. "But I must introduce you to Zola. There he is," he said, pointing to a thickly built, massive man in evening clothes; for, as Manet said, a serious writer cannot be expected to put on fancy dress.

Zola bowed and passed on, chilling us a little; Manet would have liked to watch him struggling into a new acquaintanceship, and we walked on together conscious of our failure, myself thinking how pleasant it would have been to have gone with them into a corner, and talked art for half an hour, "and what a wonderful memory it would have been!" I thought, and begged Manet a few minutes later to come with me in search of Zola. But he was nowhere to be found.

"He must have gone home," I said, and Manet answered: "It doesn't matter. You'll find him at home at Médan any day you like to go there."

For one reason or another it was not till some months later that I summoned courage and took the train at the Gare St.-Lazare. There is no station at Médan, the nearest station is —(the curious are referred to the time table, for I have forgotten the name of it)—and Médan is a village known only to peasants, about a mile and a half from the station. Some

chance had led Zola there, and being in want of a country residence he had purchased a cottage from one of the peasants, which he had just finished building into a sort of castle ; an ugly place it seemed to me, a great red-brick wall with a small door in it through which I was taken into the house, and left waiting in the billiard-room.

It was not Zola that came down to me, but Madame Zola. She had forgotten me, though I had met her at Manet's studio, and it was only after many tedious explanations that she somewhat reluctantly led me through the house, up many staircases of polished oak, narrow and steep. On the wall of the last little flight there were Japanese prints depicting furious fornications; a rather blatant announcement, I thought, of naturalism—but they were forgotten quickly, for in a few seconds I should be in the master's presence. She opened a door and left me, and I found myself in a place as large as the studio of an Academician, lighted by a skylight and a huge window. For a moment or two I lost my way among the massive furniture, and it was not until I passed a lectern that I discovered the master on a sofa by a window correcting proofs.

He did not rise to meet me, but contended himself with untucking his leg and motioning with his hand to a seat. His manner was terribly aloof and cold, and my embarrassment increased, for suddenly I remembered I had heard that Zola was never long in doubt, as to whether he was talking to a fool or a man of wit, and that at the end of a minute a fool was dismissed peremptorily. " And he has discovered me to be a fool though I haven't said a word." I glanced at the terrible master who lay on the sofa, his glasses on his nose, reading me, divining the commonplace remarks that I was trying to conjure up. " If Homer and Shakespeare were suddenly introduced they would have to begin with remarks about the weather or the pleasure each had taken in the other's work," I said to myself, " and if this man would only give me as much rope as he would to Shakespeare or Homer I might think of

something more interesting than the compliments that I am gabbling."

Zola was not then what he is now, a gracious, kindly man in the habit of receiving everyone who chooses to call on him, and answering all sorts of questions. He was then the iconoclast, the idol-breaker, a bear that cursed the universe, and bade all comers begone. All the same his writings exhaled a certain large-heartedness and sympathy, and I had always felt while reading his weekly article in *The Voltaire* that we were intended to understand each other. I had imagined that when I went to see him he would come forward, his hands extended in benevolent gesture, taking me at once into his confidence. But this Buddha lying on the sofa, fixing his glasses from time to time on his short, strangely square-cut nose, was in such strange conflict with my dream that I could hardly believe that this could be my Zola in those terrible moments during which I tried to improvise compliments. Not one had produced the faintest impression, no more than water flowing over a block of granite, and feverishly I sought for a subject of conversation, something, no matter what, that might interest him.

The power that the circulating libraries exercised on literature occupied my mind a good deal at that time, and I hurried to the subject, seizing the first transitional phrase.

"The position of the novelist in England is that of a slave," I said, "for books are not bought in England, but hired."

"But if a man writes a book that interests the public, the public will find it."

"The public will find it in time, no doubt," I answered, "but the man may starve in the interval."

"Yes, he may; and your difficulty is no small one—a middle-man always between you and your public."

"Ah, he's beginning to see I'm not such a fool after all," I said to myself; and as soon as I had explained the power that their monopoly gave to Mudie and Smith I deflected the conversation dexterously from the practical to the moral

question, dropping some disparaging remarks about Puritanism as an artistic influence. Zola, who had been waking for some time out of his slumber, was now wholly awake.

"What you say," the great man said, "is extremely interesting. I have written an article on the influence of Protestantism on art; it will appear in to-morrow's *Figaro*, and I make this statement, that Protestantism has never produced great art. Milton is the one Protestant writer. The Elizabethans, Shakespeare, and Jonson lived before Protestantism had taken hold of the national spirit, the genius of the nation, and so on."

The conversation then became friendly and pleasant. Zola asked me about George Eliot; which did I think was her best book? What French writer was she most like? Though I felt I was risking my newly acquired reputation, I had to admit that I could think of no one to compare her with. The conversation paused a moment, and to my surprise and pleasure Zola began to tell me about the novel he was writing. We must have talked for three-quarters of an hour, and then, fearing to outstay my welcome, I bade the master good-bye. He took me downstairs, vivacious all the time, and asked me to come to see him again. "I have made a friend," I repeated to myself as the carriage rolled through the flat, green French country, with poplars pointing to the first stars. A train shrieked across the grey evening. "I have made a friend," I repeated, and as the rattles died one by one in the dusk I said: "Yes, he is the very man I had imagined from reading his articles. A clear, well-balanced mind, a sympathetic nature, passionate in his convictions, loyal to his opinions. A little roughness at first; possibly what I mistook for roughness was mere shyness; besides, it cannot be amusing to be told to your face that you are a great writer. I shouldn't like it myself. Yes, I've made a friend."

Years passed. I had written many books. "A Mummer's Wife" had been translated into French; it had been published

in *The Voltaire* and the *Vie Populaire.* Charpentier was about to issue it in book form, and Zola had promised to write a preface. The " Confessions of a Young Man " was appearing in *La Revue Indépendante*, and the report had gone abroad that the next instalment would contain a scathing attack on " La Terre." I wrote to Zola saying that this was not true, and proposing to spend Monday with him. " On Monday morning you will receive the new number of the *Review*, and we shall be able to discuss the matter at breakfast." I knew that the number contained—well, some frivolous remarks about naturalism ; these I hoped to be able to explain away. But I did not feel quite at ease, so I called on my way for the faithful Alexis—bulky Alexis's placid temperament would serve as a buffer when the discussion became strained. However happily it might end there could hardly fail to be moments when—— I don't think I finished the sentence at the time ; I will not seek to do so now.

Our walk lay by the river shimmering like watered silk between green banks full of the lush of June, and beyond them the green French country seemed to rejoice in the sunshine like a living creature. We sauntered, talking about our books, taking pleasure in the poplars growing so tall and straight out of the plain, and the white clouds hanging between the trees. And when remembrances of Zola interrupted my reveries I told Alexis exactly what I had written, and the dear fellow assured me that Zola could not take offence at such light criticism.

" Yes, Alexis, but you always say what is agreeable to hear."

II

As before, Zola was lying on the sofa by the window, and after a few words of greeting, he said :

" I'm afraid, my dear friend, that I shall not be able to

write the preface. You have made it impossible for me to do so. We are going down to breakfast now, but after breakfast we will go into the matter thoroughly; I will read the passages aloud to you."

"Good heavens!" I thought, "I wish I hadn't come."

After breakfast, Zola, Alexis, and myself walked in the garden talking of indifferent things for an hour or more. Then Zola said:

"We will now go upstairs." He led the way, and I followed feeling very much as I used to feel at school when ordered a flogging. The master lay on the sofa; I took a small chair; he said: "You'll be more comfortable in a larger one."

The passages were already marked, and they were read to me in a low and deliberate voice. I listened, thinking what was the best defence to set up; Zola commented on every fresh sarcasm.

"How can I write your preface after that? I want to, you know, but I ask you how can I? Listen!"

"Don't you see, my dear friend, that that book is not my real opinion about life and things, but rather an attempt to reduce to words the fugitive imaginings of my mind, its intimate workings, its shifting colours? Has it never come to you to think differently about things? To find your mind in a ferment of contradiction?'

"No," he said, "I do not change my opinions easily. There is Alexis" (he was indeed there, round as a barrel with the inevitable cigar between his teeth); "I have known Alexis these five-and-twenty years, and I think of him to-day exactly as I always thought of him. With me an opinion is like a heavy piece of furniture; it is moved with difficulty."

"But," I said, "the passages you have just read are from a chapter entitled 'La Synthèse de la Nouvelle Athènes,' and must be taken as an expression of the opinions of the various *ratés* who assemble there."

"I will admit that as a legitimate defence, but you see the

opinions expressed in the *café* coincide exactly with those which you express yourself in an earlier part of the book."

I had to fall back on the original defence, that a man changes ; contradictory thinking should not be taken for the opinions which he holds by and abides by.

"How often do we hear Christians make jokes against Christianity !" I thought the argument specious, but Zola did not notice it. He continued reading :

"After what you have written about Goncourt," he said, "you never can go to his house again."

"I don't want to ; he isn't a friend."

"The disciples, the childish vanity, the *bric-à-brac*, even the accusation of making copy out of his brother's corpse, *tout est là, rien ne manque*. What you say of me is nothing compared with what you say of Goncourt." I hastened to concur in this opinion, but Zola was not to be wheedled. "No, my dear friend," he said gravely and sadly, "you don't call your book 'Memoirs d'un Jeune Anglais,' you say 'Confessions d'un Jeune Anglais,' and when we use the word Confessions we mean that at last we are going to tell the truth. I have gone through these pages calling attention to the expressions used, not because I am angry, but because I want to convince you that you have made it impossible for me to write the preface to your 'Mummer's Wife.' What you think of me does not affect me. No, I won't say that ; we are old friends. What you say about me does affect me, though nothing that you can say can affect my position. You admit in your book that you owe your first inspiration to me. I am proud that this is so, and thank you for saying it. I am sorry you have changed your opinions ; after all it is the eternal law —children devour their fathers. I make no complaint. Nature has willed it so."

He spoke these words sadly as he walked across the room. The twilight was gathering, the great furniture loomed up like shadows. There were tears in my eyes. Never did I feel so distinct a sensation of my inferiority ; the man was great in

his simplicity. "The man is greater than his books," I said to myself, "and that is a great deal, for he has written some very fine books."

I have told the story of these two meetings with some levity, but I was deeply moved at the time, and I am troubled even now, for is it always right to wear one's heart on one's sleeve, and to publish one's opinions as they come up in one's mind? Or is it better to look upon one's opinions as heavy pieces of furniture that are moved with difficulty. Alexis had devoted months to the correction of the translation that Charpentier was about to issue, and looked to Zola's preface to recoup himself for the labour he had spent upon the book, and a few casual words of mine had wrecked these hopes. He did not reproach me with having cost him some monetary losses; he merely said, "*C'est Charpentier qui va boire un bouillon. Mille francs de corrections.*" The grey-green country stretched out before us, flat and dim—a dark mass of trees in front of us, a poplar striking out of the long plain. Alexis lectured me as we walked through the lonely country, but I did not listen. All the while I thought of Zola's last words as he bade me good-bye. "I hope you understand that our personal relations are the same as they always were, only you have made it impossible for me to write the preface."

At this time Zola was a fat man; soon after he became a thin one. By abstaining from drink at his meals he reduced his weight thirty-six French pounds in two months. He seems to have accepted Balzac's maxim, that the elegance of life exists mainly in the waist. As his waist narrowed his manner of life became more expansive. No longer is he the recluse of Médan; he has added a tower to his country house—with what intention I never fully understood—and he lives in a spacious mansion in the Rue de Bruxelles, which he has furnished with oak carvings, tapestries, portraits of archbishops and wrought-iron railings. A plaster cast of the Venus de Milo stands on the balustrade that encircles the staircase. The house seems to reveal a large coarse mind, a

sort of coarsely woven net through whose meshes all live things escape, and that brings to shore only a quantity of *débris*. " From the Rue de Lafayette," I said. Why should he consider it incumbent upon him to collect these things ? Great artists need not be learned in *bric-à-brac*. Manet lived all his life amid red plush furniture ; and I am not sure that I should have spoken of Zola's furniture (has it not been described by reporters and reproduced in photography in every illustrated periodical ?) if it had not been that with the acquisition of a waist and much general *bric-à-brac* a definite mental change has come upon Zola. I once heard him say he was going to give a ball. I don't think he ever carried the project into execution. However this may be, his house has, for the last three years, been open to visitors, and he has answered the ten thousand heterogeneous questions that the eleven hundred and fifty-seven interviewers have put to him with unfailing urbanity, and I am bound to admit, with extraordinary common sense.

His mind is not as intense or penetrating as Tourgueneff's, but it looks with admirable lucidity over a wide surface, and he can answer the most foolish questions reasonably. An elderly lady's apple-cart has been upset in the Place Cliche, and a reporter calls on Zola for his opinion. He says that he has no precise information on the subject of apples, but he believes that apple-growing is a very large industry in the north of France. If the apple-sellers of Montmartre are prevented from exposing their wares for sale, the liberty of the individual is called into question, and a very large and important industry is possibly affected. At the same time the streets cannot—— And so on. But even these platitudes he will relieve with some touch of rare common sense. This touch I have left out, it is the incommunicable secret of his genius. But if any reader of this article should desire to hear Zola talk, I will recommend him to a book called " Enquête Littéraire " by Jules Huret. Huret's interview with Zola is an astonishing piece of literature In this interview we perceive, as we

should in a long intercourse with Zola himself, that his genius is but the triumph and apotheosis of common sense. For his genius is wingless, it never rises towards the stars ; it maintains itself at what I may term the level of superior mediocrity, and it is with him always, on small as on great occasions. Take his answer to an interviewer who called on him at the Savoy Hotel. Zola had arrived late the night before, and had only just got out of bed. The question was : " What are your impressions of London ?" The answer was : " My first impression of London was an excellent appetite. The train was late, and we didn't dine until nine o'clock, but we dined excellently well." Is it possible to answer a foolish question more sensibly ?

I said just now that Zola's vision of life was not so intense, penetrating, or subtle as Tourgueneff's. He is an old-world hero, a patriarch belated in the nineteenth century, for not Abraham himself, encamped amid his flocks, herds, and a numerous servitude, saw or thought more simply than he does. There are hackney carriages, washerwomen, and *châssepots* in the "Rougon Macquart " series, but these are merely adventitious attractions which affect in no way the general character of the work. Hugo is said to be the last of the old-world poets ; but the real difference between Zola and Hugo is that one can, and the other cannot, write verse. Take from Hugo his genius of versification and you would get the novelist. He would have produced a set of novels very similar to the " Rougon Macquart " series. It would have been in twenty volumes, possibly in more, and would have sold as largely. Robbed of his versification, Hugo would have accepted the hackney carriages and the washerwomen. He could not have done otherwise, and both men saw life from the outside, and their tendency was to exaggerate the outside. All the same the hypothetical work would have differed from the " Rougon Macquart." Hugo was more naturally an artist than Zola. His imagination was rarer, but it was not more powerful nor more fecund. Zola's imagination is one of

the most extraordinary. Can you not see incestuous Renée dreaming in her yellow boudoir, or feverishly flung on the skins under the malign shade of tropical plants in the great conservatory ? Are not the Paris markets in your mind—the roofs for ever silhouetting against the pale sky ? The smell of the fish and the hundred colours of the fish ; the vaults where the children roll amid the feathers ? And the scene where they chop the pigeons' heads, disputing how many So-and-so can bleed in an hour ? And how intimately conscious we are of the great garden of the Paradou and of Albine, who dies asphyxiated by the flowers with which she has filled the room ; the enumeration of the flowers, the evocation of an orchestra of scents, for every scent recalls the sound of an instrument, and the last phrase—" Albine dies in a supreme hiccup of flowers "—how wonderful !

And do we not all remember the gold-chain makers in " L'Assommoir " and the vestment makers in " Le Rêve "? In " Au Bonheur des Dames " the work of every employé is explained ; the phenomena of each passing hour are revealed to us. " Germinal " is full of every detail of miner life—the ropes, the pulleys, the furnaces, the trucks, the horses. I stay my pen to ask has Zola furnished these extraordinary evocations of the externals of human life with human souls ? to ask has he created characters that will not suffer by comparison with Balzac's ? Zola's evocation of souls is slight, nearly always fragmentary and shadowy. A soul haunts in Gervaise, and Coupeau, too, has a soul, and through the numberless pages a few shades flit vaguely recognizable as human souls. That is all. In the line of souls Gervaise is his greatest achievement, and that is why I place " L'Assommoir " above all his other books. There are other reasons. When he wrote " L'Assommoir " Zola was, more than he ever was before, and certainly more than he ever was since, a pupil of Flaubert. The book is written entirely in Flaubert's manner, the short sentences relieved by the pictorial epithet. The old masters thought that originality was found in individual feeling and

seeing rather than in mannerism, and as I share their opinion I think that it is regrettable that Zola did not continue to write in the style in which he produced his finest book. But the style became too laborious for him, and after *L'Assommoir* his style became looser, and with every fresh book he seems more and more inclined to abandon himself to the ease of redundant expression. There are fine pages even in his worst books, but so far as my personal taste and interest are engaged in his work, I would choose to have revised editions of his early works, rather than the new novels he contemplates writing—"Lourdes," "Paris," "Rome," etc.

Revised editions of Zola's works! How easily one drops into talking nonsense! His method of novel-writing does not admit of revision. As well might we ask the editor of a daily paper for concentration of expression in leading articles, dramatic notes, and reports of boat-races. During the last ten or a dozen years a striking resemblance has grown up between the Zola novel and the popular newspaper. The novel and the newspaper seem to me to stand on the same footing, the intention of both being the same, and the means employed the same. It is true that Zola's reports on the Franco-German war are better done than the reports of the war correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*. It is also true that the scenery at the "Lyceum" is better painted than the scenery at the "Surrey," but that is hardly a reason for confusing a set taken from *Much Ado about Nothing* with the pictures of Turner, Constable, and Wilson, and we find a like difference between the battle pieces in "War and Peace" and those in "La Débâcle"—a difference not of degree but a difference of kind. Zola's novel is practically the daily paper. He has discovered a formula that suits the average man as well as the *Daily Telegraph* or the *Petit Journal*, and he chooses his subjects, not in obedience to an artistic instinct, but in accordance with public taste. Three hundred thousand pilgrims go to Lourdes yearly. Every pilgrim is a certain reader, and the afflicted in all countries are interested in the question. Between belief

and unbelief he will steer a middle course just as he steered a middle course between France and Prussia. I heard him boast, without ever perceiving the enormous artistic significance of what he was saying, that he had written a French novel on the war without giving Prussia cause for offence. But the sublime impartiality of the true artist is very different from the mock impartiality of the journalist who wants to get up a controversy. The true artist sees life as God sees it, without prejudice; life is for him—I think the phrase is Flaubert's—*une hallucination à transporter.*

Zola told me that he had gone into calculation, and, allowing for a fortnight's holiday at Christmas, "Lourdes" would take him seven months to write. Five hundred pages in seven months! Tolstoy took six years to write "Anna Karenina," ten to write "War and Peace"; Flaubert took seventeen years to write "La Tentation de St. Antoine," eight or nine to write "L'Education Sentimental"; and seven or eight translators are already at work on "Lourdes"; it will appear in the *New York Herald*, and Mr. Bennet has paid a thousand pounds for the serial rights. But adequate information regarding the various forms and languages in which this book will appear would be the subject of an article on bibliography. Suffice it to say here that it will bring Zola something like four thousand pounds before it reaches Charpentier in book form; it will then be read by everybody except men of letters—but their number is so small that the abstention will not materially affect the sale. If the book does not sell three hundred thousand copies it is a failure, and if the book on the Russian Alliance which will follow does not sell half a million it will be a failure. Did any great writer ever see literature from this point of view before?

The idea of conquest seems inherent in Zola. Five-and-twenty years ago he wrote a book called "La Conquête de Plassaus." The idea of conquest cropped up again in *L'Œuvre*, and this time it was Paris that was conquered. And now it seems that Zola meditates the conquest of the world. He

came to England at the head of an army of journalists; rockets were let off at the Crystal Palace, and trumpets were blown in his honour at the Mansion House. He will probably proceed on a similar mission to St. Petersburg (it has already been spoken of); he may even visit America. Why not? There are sixty millions in the United States, who through the medium of translation, may read the "Rougon Macquart"! The newspapers reported that Madame Zola, astonished at the length of our London suburbs, said: "This is a town that would suit you, Emile." Every house represented to her a possible sale of a novel, Charpentier edition, three francs fifty. If he were told that a concierge had not heard his name he would feel discouraged. An enquiry would be set on foot, and if a concierges' guild could be discovered he would arrange to address a meeting. He looks upon all men who do not read his novels as lost. Lost to what? Ah, that I cannot say; not to art, for the quality of his writing does not seem to concern him any more than the quality of the things he buys. The carved woodwork and the iron railings may not be finely wrought, but they photograph all right, and every interviewer is received and every sightseer—Chinese, Peruvians, Eskimo—all and sundry are granted audience, and the afternoon passes in talking of how books may be best put on the market.

Some translation of his works must appear in every dialect, and to discover one not yet reduced to written characters, and to arrange that the first work printed in it should be a translation of the "Rougon Macquart" series, would be fame indeed. M. Bruneau comes in with the score of the music he has just written for one of the novels, and the gentleman from Paraguay jumps up and proposes to do the opera into the language spoken in his country; the Thibetan might do the same. Bruneau and Zola put their heads together. Hurrah! another outlet has been discovered, and the terms of the contract are discussed. Only the other day in an article on the lyrical drama, after coupling Wagner and Bruneau together, Zola explained that he would create a lyrical drama

with human characters ; and when he has done this " the colossal Wagner will grow pale on the high pedestal of his symbols." Zola believes that young French composers have not written great music because their libretti are not sufficiently human. In a word, he imagines himself writing various libretti to which the young French composers will add a little music as cream is added to *méringues*. Well, if a man will talk on all subjects the time will come when he will talk nonsense. I am afraid that time has come for Zola !

The desire of gold for its own sake is comprehensible in a way ; but Zola has no love of money, he has squandered all he made on vulgar decoration and absurd architecture. The pleasures of life bore him exceedingly, so he says ; but I am afraid that he has not acquainted himself with them. Of the pleasures of Art he is equally ignorant. His youth was beset with difficulties sufficient, be it admitted to his credit, to conquer all but the most resolute. He wrote for four hours every morning at a novel, and every afternoon he wrote an article for a newspaper, and those who have felt the pressure of a weekly article, while engaged on a work of the imagination, will appreciate the severity of the ordeal that Zola bore for many years unflinchingly. He had little time for reflection or study, and was only able to catch the few ideas abroad in his day as they passed him. He read his contemporaries, Flaubert, Goncourt, Daudet, and to obtain a platform whence he might preach his doctrine he read Balzac and Hugo ; but with the heart of French literature, with Montaigne, Saint-Simon, and La Bruyère, it may be doubted if his knowledge is more than rudimentary. The influence of Manet and Flaubert and Goncourt persuaded him that he was interested in the external world, and we hailed "L'Assommoir" as a masterpiece, for we wished to group ourselves round some great writer. We hugged the belief that, set free from pecuniary anxieties, he would read, think, travel, and refrain from constant production, giving three or four years to the composition and the writing of each book. We believed that

he would cultivate refinement of thought, and refinement of literary expression. But Zola was not naturally an artist. Instead of the books becoming more and more beautiful, they have become larger, looser, and uglier, and they serve no purpose whatsoever, except to find money for the purchase of cock-eyed saints on gold backgrounds.

Alas ! the ridiculous towers of Médan ! Alas ! the arrival of translators from Paraguay ! Alas ! the blowing of trumpets before the Lord Mayor of London in honour of "La Terre," "La Débâcle," "L'Argent," and "Docteur Pascal" !

And, three times, alas, for are we not now menaced by a novel on Lourdes, on Rome, and on Paris ? In these novels he will re-write everything that he has written before. His friends will drop away from him ; he will be left alone ; his excellent cigars will fail to attract us, and smoking bad ones in the *café* we shall regret his life and his works, and the mistake we made ; and when the *café* closes we shall stand on the edge of the pavement wondering what the end will be. One of us will say, it will probably be Huysmans : "In 'Le Ventre de Paris,' there is a pork butcher who, after having worked ten hours a day all his life, is found dead sitting before a table *son nez dans le boudin.*"

"And you think," I shall say, "that he will just drop from sheer exhaustion over his writing table *son nez dans le boudin ?*"

Huysmans will not answer, he will remember that Zola is the friend of his life. The little group will separate, and wending my way to my little flat in the Rue de la Tour des Dames, I shall think of Zola as a striking instance of the insanity of common sense.

AN ACTRESS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Some four or five years ago M. Goncourt announced his intention to refrain from writing any more novels. He has kept his word, and has since confined himself to extracting from his diary such passages as he judges may be published during his lifetime, and to completing the series of historical studies of the actresses of the eighteenth century, which he began years ago in conjunction with his brother. He has lately published the biography of Mlle. Clairon, " by means of her secret and intimate correspondence by the aid of the divulgations of the police reports on her private life." His object has been, he says, " to reconstruct the character of the illustrious *tragédienne* and pseudo-German Princess in all its crude reality, and the material routine of her existence." M. Goncourt has done miraculously well what he set himself to do. I doubt indeed if he has ever written a better book, and I do not except those he wrote in conjunction with his brother, nor do I attempt to differentiate between his novels and his historical studies. His biography of Mlle. Clairon has interested me exactly as his novels have interested me, only perhaps in the biography the charm is more enveloping and more naturally seductive. I have never read a book with greater interest. My knowledge of life has been definitely increased, and at the moment I know no one so intensely and so completely as Mlle. Clairon. Out of the innumerable accidents and countless passions with which her life was shaken I select for the purpose of this article these three or four.

When Mlle. Clairon was a child, her mother, a work-woman, who could not afford to pay anyone to look after her, often left her under the guardianship of lock and key in the

bedroom. To pass the time, the child used to climb on a chair and look into a room opposite where an actress was engaged in rehearsing her part. She watched the actress closely, studying her gestures, and practising them when she had finished ; and her industrious and persistent mimicry was of such value to the child that her mother agreed to allow her to attend school. Her manner of coming in, going out, and sitting down was entirely changed, her little body took new graces, her intelligence developed. But her secret weighed heavily upon her, and she confessed it all to a man who used to come to the house and who treated her less harshly than the others. He told her that the actress was Mlle. Dangeville, explained to her what was the Comédie Française, and finally obtained permission from her mother to take her to see a performance of *Le Comte d'Essex et les Folies Amoureuses*. What passed within her on that evening Clairon was never able to tell very clearly. She remembered only that she could not utter a word, and her absorption was so great that her mother was about to turn her away when she returned home. *Allez-vous coucher, grosse bête!* She fled to her bed, but instead of going to sleep, she spent the entire night in turning over and over in her little brain what she had heard declaimed on the stage, and next day the stupefaction was great among the frequenters of that house at hearing the child repeat more than two hundred verses from the tragedy and two-thirds of the little play. But this effort of memory was nothing compared to her assimulation of the manner of every actor—the *grasseyement* of Grandval, the stuttering of Poisson, the regulated mimicry of Mlle. Dangeville. Henceforth, notwithstanding all the abuse and blows her mother showered upon her, she refused to learn to sew, finding, even then, in her little dramatic soul, one of those tragic phrases, one of those *claironades* which, in after years, she made such frequent use of, crying, as she drove back her childish tears, " Kill me ; you had better do so, for if you don't I shall be an actress." And nothing could force Clairon to give up her vocation ; and her

mother, seeing that she was losing her health, was obliged to give way, and Clairon joined soon after the Italian Comedy, and was given instruction in writing, in dancing, in the Italian language. She was hardly fourteen when she made her first appearance.

Love adventures naturally began soon after. In her "Mémoires" she is very silent regarding those early years—years of poverty and low vice; but the police reports of which M. Goncourt speaks, and from which he gives some astonishing citations, are more explicit. Her lovers seem to have been of all kinds, and as numerous as the sand on the shore. At Gand, my lord the Duke of Marlborough offered her an immense fortune, which, however, for patriotic reasons she declined to accept. There were captains and colonels, there were authors and *abbés ;* like the lady in Congreve's comedy, lovers were to her like curl-papers ; she made them as fast as she pleased, and then if she pleased she made more. It is not, however, until we find her established in Paris, a great actress, creating the leading parts in all the great tragedies of her time, that any lover appears upon whom she bestowed any more than the favour of a passing caprice. Sometimes her lovers were rich, sometimes poor ; sometimes she ruined them, oftener it must be confessed they ruined her. And the end of all these leave-takings were poverty and trouble. And the letters written about this time have for refrain : *Je suis sans le sol.* And at every moment she was obliged to have recourse to her friends and her former lovers. Looking over her life I find three love stories which represent especially well the three most usual phases of her character, and these stories seem to me to be not only typical of the woman, but of life itself. The first of these three lovers was Marmontel, a young and fashionable author, whose tragedies were played constantly at the Comédie Française. According to him, Clairon was a mistress full of vivacity, gaiety, and all the characteristics of an amiable naturalness without admixture of any caprice, having but the one desire to make her lover happy.

At the end of a few months of this love, which was to last for ever, she said to Marmontel, who was supping with her at a friend's house : " 'N'y venez-pas ce soir, vous seriez mal à votre aise ; le bailli de Fleury doit y souper, et il me ramène.' 'J'en suis connu,' lui répondait naïvement Marmontel, 'il voudra bien me ramener aussi.' 'Non, il n'aura qu'un vis-à-vis.' Marmontel à ce mot devinait tout, et laissait voir sa surprise sur la figure. 'Est-il bien vrai, parlez-vous serieusement ?' 'Oui, je suis folle quelquefois, mais je ne serai jamais fausse.' " A few days after Marmontel received a letter from Clairon asking him to come and see her on a matter of importance. He went, and the matter of importance was that she liked him far better than le bailli de Fleury, and begged to be reinstated in his affections. This Marmontel refused ; but when his next piece was read at the Comédie, to the astonishment of the actors, and even of Clairon, he gave the principal part to Mlle. Clairon. A quarter of an hour after, she arrived at his house, accompanied by a friend : " Take it, sir," she said, speaking as she would on the stage and throwing the MS. at his feet. " I cannot accept the part without the author, for both belong to me." Marmontel explained that he belonged to her as a friend, and that any other sentiment only made them unhappy. " He is right," cried Clairon ; " my folly makes us both miserable. Come then, my friend, and dine at your friend's house."

On this amorous *liaison*, so gallantly broken off by mutual agreements, during the course of the rehearsals of the Aristomène there was founded a friendship which lasted for thirty years unshadowed by a single cloud.

It is difficult to imagine anything more deliciously eighteenth century than this anecdote. But more deeply human is the story of the actress's love for Larive. Larive was a young actor in whom Clairon took the warmest interest, and her correspondence with him shows the actress amid her daily occupations. We see her starting to *promener son importance au Bois de Boulogne*, we learn that her sprained arm is better,

and that her cook has left her. It is Clairon who looks after the money of the young actor; and she tells him never to deprive himself of any real necessary, for to do so narrows the heart; and throughout these gossiping letters a slight moral tone prevails, the grave words of a father or of a loving mother. Sometimes she upbraids him, but she is quick to beg forgiveness for a harsh word addressed to the spoilt child of her heart. He sends her every new part he plays, and she instructs and advises him; nor does she fear to open the chapter entitled Women; indeed she returns to it often. Caprices she will permit him, but begs of him to beware of any serious attachment. And always behind a mask of pure affection we find ourself in the presence of the passion of an old woman for a young man. A warm and sensual tenderness penetrates these letters. Nor do I know anything more strangely dramatic than those written when Larive began to think of marriage—those dolorous cries with which she tells him that she will not be able to see him again. "Good-bye, be happy; this is the only consolation I ask from you, and whatever may happen to me you will always serve to remind me of the instability of human things. I said yesterday that I counted on you as on myself, that you would be the delight of my life, and to-day I am forced to tell you that we are lost to one another for ever."

The third lover who left his mark on her life was the Comte de Valbelle. This *liaison* lasted for nineteen years—it is true with the help of a certain number of coadjutors. In the first years of their *liaison*, the Comte had very little money, and to gratify his taste for good living, Clairon was frequently obliged to sell all that was not absolutely necessary, and live in the greatest poverty. Thousands of women have done this; but there is, to my mind, something strangely grand and noble in the passion for a memory which allows a woman to write to a lover—and, mind you, to a lover who had left her—in reply to a letter saying that although he had four thousand a year, he had not twenty-five louis to lend to *une amie*: ." I

shall be glad to send you fifty louis if you want them ; I have them, and if I hadn't them I would sell all I have, as I have done before, so that I might give them to you." A few weeks after she sold her jewellery, her furniture, her wardrobe, all she had, so that she might lend him the money he wanted. "I forgive you the misfortunes you have caused me, and I beg of you to cherish my memory. . . . Tears prevent me from seeing what I am writing. Adieu, Val."

In writing of this strange woman, so multiple and so diverse, and yet single-natured when we come to study, and through study to understand her, I have addressed myself entirely to the human, I will say the fleshly side of her character ; but it is necessary now that I should allude, even if I can do no more, to that splendid intellectual nature which made her Mlle. Clairon, and which is her claim upon the consideration of posterity. Her intellect was as passionate as her flesh, and we know how that was attuned to all emotions. The woman was strung with passion, and vibrated all her life like a harp in the wind. Like her physical nature her intellectual nature was passion, yes, truly, she was as passionate in her art as she was in her loves. Life came to her in two great passions—love of art and love of man ; she sacrificed all else for these, and occasion never came in her life when she found herself obliged to choose between them. Space is wanting to tell of her life-long rivalry with Mlle. Dumesnil. Suffice it to say that these two actresses disputed the dramatic sceptre at the Comédie Française for many a year. One was the first *tragédienne* that dared to *speak* on the stage, the other remained in the empyrean of the old-fashioned grandiloquent tragedy, the *tragédienne* of thunder and lightning. One with a more modern talent, newer, more prescient of the future ; the other with perhaps more genius. It must, however, be remembered that if Mlle. Dumesnil was the first to *speak* on the stage, Mlle. Clairon

was the first to appear on the stage without *paniers*. It is to her that we owe the reform in theatrical costume, and it was she who inaugurated the first movement in the direction of local colour. No space remains to me to speak again of her letter of farewell to the Comte de Valbelle, of her life at the Margrave's Court, of how she was supplanted in the affections of the Margrave by Lady Craven, and how, after seventeen years of absence, she was obliged to return to France. Still I would not close this article without saying a word on the old age of Clairon.

M. Goncourt says : " An old age of passions badly calmed, of resentments unappeased, without any softening of the heart, without charity in the soul. Never in Clairon a pretty regret for the past, one of those smiling melancholy moods of the aged sinner, as in the case of Sophie Arnold ; never a gentle and witty mocking at the suffering of the body." . . . I think that M. Goncourt judges the character that he has created, or, should I say, evoked from the past, somewhat harshly. The strange passionate woman whom we have seen as a disobedient child refusing to learn to sew, whom we have seen at the little supper-parties in the Rue Bussy and the great supper-parties in Racine's old apartment, whom we have seen as the illustrious *tragédienne* of the Comédie Française creating all the leading parts in Voltaire's greatest plays, whom we have seen a sort of German Princess at the Margrave's Court, and whom we now see sitting alone, deserted by all in her solitary house at Issy, I confess, affects me differently. Yes, I am inclined to judge her more lightly. I am inclined to think of her kindly, even when she writes to a would-be visitor describing her wrinkles and her want of teeth in exaggerated terms, obviously because she would not have him too deeply shocked at her appearance. This terrible sensibility, this passion for life that years could not quench, is not wholly unsympathetic to me. It attracts me, and when I find the old woman, now eighty years of age, writing : " I know I am eighty, but my heart is between five-and-twenty and

thirty," I am filled with wonder and admiration for the vital energy that could find such words after so many years of passion and adventure, and having regard for her great love of life it seems to me impossible to withhold from her our forgiveness and love.

LE REVERS D'UN GRAND HOMME

An interesting article might be written on the part accident or luck plays in the composition of works of art. Edgar Poe did not take the initial accidents of inspiration into consideration when, in the "Philosophy of Composition" he told how he wrote "The Raven." But his was a mind that would have seen the oversight had it been pointed out, and would have confessed that in the strain and stress of other thoughts, this, the very corner-stone of the theory he was constructing, had escaped him. To supply a deficiency in our analytical literature, I will suggest that some writer should take his best-known book and tell the tale of the luck that followed him in the composition of it, showing thereby how the book would never have attained the form in which it exists, had it not been for the adventitious aids of special circumstances. Waiting the advent of this modest essayist, let us believe that two things are necessary for the success of every literary enterprise—the accident and the man. A paragraph in a newspaper, a word dropped in conversation, the sight of a special landscape in a special light, a moment of *ennui* or of joy, it is such things as these that dictate the first idea of a book. Philosophically, of course, there is no such thing as chance; but, accepting the word in its everyday meaning, who can say that chance has not a large share in the creation of a work of art? To-day the artistic mind is healthy, and fit for fecundation, but the breeze sets from the wrong quarter, and no pollen comes to fertilize it; to-morrow the mind is indisposed, unready to receive, or maybe the pollen that the breeze brings is not of prime vigour; the fecundation is, nevertheless, accomplished, and the process of cerebral gestation begins.

The value, therefore, of the incentive chance is, surely, incalculable. When the rich thought falls into the rich furrow, each reinforces the other, and every day the writer finds his field growing more luxuriantly and flowering in unexpected places. But alack the hour! when the thin thought falls into the furrow; rich though the soil be, it exhausts itself in vain efforts to infuse life and health into the seed—a short, scant harvesting is the inevitable crop.

What writer, as he turns his thoughts over, has not longed for the kindling word, for the incentive suggestion? Sometimes it lies for months forgotten in the fallow of the mind, sometimes for years; then, and only then, a tiny shoot appears. With what joy it is hailed, and how soon it grows and spreads! What writer, as he restlessly throws aside thoughts dry as withered leaves, has not basely envied another writer his subject, or regretted that some dramatic event, divorce, or suicide, now in progress through the newspapers, was not whispered to him as he walked home some evening, or sat brooding over the fire listening to the chirping of thoughts he is weary of?

Such regret laid fast hold of me when I had read a few pages of that extraordinary book lately published by Messrs. Fisher Unwin, "The Letters of the Duke of Wellington to Miss J." "Oh, what a subject for a novel!" I cried. "Why did not some angel or demon whisper it to me?" Here is the subject: Miss J., a young lady of marked religious tendency of mind, succeeded in converting a hardened criminal who had been convicted of murder, and was awaiting the death sentence. The man had resisted the efforts of the Protestant and Catholic clergymen; but the influence of Miss J. produced such an effect on him that he confessed his guilt, and "professed repentance and conversion."

The result of this success convinced Miss J. that she had been called to do great work, and scanning the horizon of life from her little lodging in Kensington, she espied the Duke of Wellington, and decided that he would suit her purpose very

well indeed. Miss J. was one of those women who believe that they are born to influence the destinies of great men; and Miss J. was more qualified for the task of influencing the Duke than she knew, and this is paying a high tribute to Miss J.'s modesty, for she was a beautiful girl. The first letter of a correspondence which lasted over seventeen years, the editor says, is unfortunately missing, and Miss J. gives no extracts from it in her diary. The editor is right; the absence of this letter is regrettable, for it would have settled whether the Duke knew that his correspondent was a beautiful girl of twenty, and not an elderly lady of fifty. A most important fact, this, as all who receive letters in their public capacity will testify. After the series of letters, "I understand you and you understand me, let's go under the willows and weep," he who has found a skinny spinster of fifty, extending to him a sisterly hand, will take care to make sure of the fair incognita's age and personal appearance before he risks himself in another adventure. That Miss J.'s first letter, notwithstanding the nauseating religious phraseology it was most assuredly couched in, did convey some slight inkling of the charms that awaited his Grace, should he come to see her, I think there is little room to doubt, though the biblical cant in which she must have wrapped up this necessary bit of worldliness must remain a matter of conjecture.

Technically, the hypocrite is one who is conscious that he is passing himself off upon others for what he is not, by means of moral disguisements. But in actual life no such being exists. Hypocrites are not distinctly conscious of their hypocrisy; otherwise they would deceive no one. Miss J. was undoubtedly a religious woman; at the same time she must have used religion as a cloak under which she might advantageously ensnare the Duke into a promise of marriage, or, at least, procure a compromising letter from him; but in her case the dividing line between truth and untruth is so faint as to be practically indefinable; yet we are sensible that it is there, just as we are sensible of the horizon's line, although we cannot

follow it through the midday mist and glitter of the sea.

The Duke having been assured, as I beg leave to suggest, that his correspondent was young and fair, replied with alacrity. " He regrets that he will be detained at Walmer Castle for more than a fortnight, but suggests that Miss J. should write informing him if she would be then in town ?" A meeting was arranged and it took place in the back-parlour. Miss J. armed herself with a large Bible ; but in spite of the weapon, the Duke seized her hand, exclaiming, " How I love you—how I love you !" On being questioned by Miss J., concerning who had caused him to feel thus towards her, he replied, " God Almighty." The account of this strange interview is taken from Miss J.'s diary. " During the next visit from the Duke," Miss J. writes, " the Duke speaking of his feeling for me, exclaimed, 'This must be for life !' twice over successively. He then asked me if I felt enough love for him to be with him a whole life, to which I replied, 'If it be the will of God.' I observed much excitement about him, and, in a very hurried manner, he told me he was going on a visit to the King." She did not see the Duke again for some time ; and in the meantime reflection led Miss J. to suspect the propriety of these visits, and she wrote him her usual long pietistic rigmarole, interlarded with scriptural quotations, out of which I pick the following, as being indicative of the Duke's desires : " I cannot place myself in the power of one who, however honourable and noble, seems occasionally to forget that he is confided in by a being," etc. Then again, " That you should think of me, notwithstanding your occasional forgetfulness, with any other than the most honourable feelings is, of course, as impossible as," etc. To this missive the Duke answered : " My dear Miss J.,—I have received your letter and enclosures. I beg to remind you of what I said to you the second day that I saw you ; and, if you recollect it, you will not be surprised at my telling you that I entirely concur in the intention which you have communicated to me."

We know all about the critics who will not impute evil motives, and who are sure that the world is not half so bad as some people would try to make it out to be ; but surely every man of the world must smile as he reads the Duke's letter, and reading the wealth of meaning that lies locked between the lines he will roar with laughter, remembering the celebrated " Fanny ! publish and be damned." But although the Duke was willing to let the woman go, the woman was by no means inclined to let the Duke go, and for seventeen years she continued to bombard him with pietistic letters, tracts, Bibles, etc. She was Exeter Hall in epitome. The efforts the poor man made to rid himself of his tormentor, the patience with which he bore with her, the time he devoted to reading her letters, and to answering them, cannot be described. Quarrels, because the Duke had not signed his name in full. Quarrels, because the Duke had not sealed the letter with his own seal. Marvellous, indeed, the picture that these letters create of the man with his name in the world standing, as it were, under the very eye of Europe, and this poor crazy woman, receding out of all sight and hearing, becoming day by day more and more like a forgotten tract on a forgotten shelf. It is pitiful as life ; it is as real as life. What a subject for a novel ! But in a novel you want proportion, you want *crescendo*, and in these letters there is neither.

I said that I regretted that someone had not whispered the theme to me as one suitable for a novel. But is it suitable for artistic treatment ? We can only find out by inquiring how those novelists, who would be drawn towards such a theme, would treat it.

Mr. Henry James would probably leave the story exactly as it is. The Duke would make some absent-minded advances, which in an absent-minded way would be repelled, or I should say avoided, slurred over. Then the flirtation would drift into vague and undermined efforts on the part of the Duke to shake himself free, and on the death of the Duke the lady would

return to Boston. Zola would probably allow the Duke to become the lady's lover. The remorse of the lady would be indicated by lavish descriptions of the cathedrals she visited. Finally, the Duke would tire of her ; Miss J. would follow him through his dissipations, distributing tracts as she went. The book would end by the description of the Duke's funeral, interwoven with the description of the violent cold in the head that prevented the lady attending the ceremony. . . . She sat on the Kensington hearthrug on a narrow cane-bottomed chair, her knees pressed forward almost against the bars of the grate. "Susan, give me another pocket-handkerchief!" "There are no more, mam, I gave you the last one ten minutes ago." Daudet would describe the Duke dying in Miss J.'s house, and the various subterfuges resorted to by the family to close Miss J.'s mouth. Guy de Maupassant would show the Duke tiring of the homilies with which this religious maniac's bedroom was ever garlanded, and would reintroduce H., the young man whom Miss J. had rejected because "he had never known a new birth into righteousness." The Duke would approve of the marriage of the young couple ; in a quiet suburban chapel he would give her away, not forgetting, however, to settle a handsome fortune upon her and her husband and their heirs for ever.

I think this is the way the subject should be treated : Miss J. would succeed in entangling the Duke sufficiently to make it imperative that he should marry her ; for it would be pleasing to show the glory of Waterloo fading in the ridicule that would follow and fasten on the absurd marriage ; above all, it would be delightful to determine how far this lady's religion was true, by testing it in the crucible of court life, and the book should be called "Le Revers d'un Grand Homme."

Fighting over again the battle of Waterloo in the back parlour would be a glorious possibility, one that Balzac might have been able to realize. Given the subject, he would have recreated it, building it strangely by the sheer edge of some blind abyss, and even when night was darkest

some spires, like tiny fingers, would be seen pointing to the stars. He would have made of it something terrible and something pitiful, but he, too, would have recoiled from the subject had he been shown the letters, for Nature appears in this book in all her shocking nakedness, in all her cruelty. Not Balzac, nor Thackeray, nor Stendhal, nor yet anyone has done what is done here ; and I am as astonished as a painter in the fifteenth century would have been at a photograph. But Art is always something more and something less than Nature, and none but the fool will enter into a competition where defeat is inevitable. In these letters the characters of the Duke and Miss J. are painted with that complete and vivid truth which is not Art but Nature, and Nature is not the end and aim of Art—she is, at most, the means to an end. In the representation of any object, an accident of light, a sentiment, a touch that reveals the artist's soul is necessary. But in this book the Duke and Miss J. are shown to us as in a mirror.

You see an astute statesman and a religious hypocrite, and he and she bore you exactly as such persons would bore you in real life, one by interminable streams of pietistic exhortations, the other by solemn care to say nothing that might not be printed in the newspaper next morning.

EPISTLE TO THE CYMRY

My dear Cousins,—

I have come with a message, and have brought my missive myself, availing myself of our cousinship, for the Irish and the Welsh are cousins—first cousins—and like all cousins we have alternately hated and loved each other. The Gael has harried the Cymry and the Cymry the Gael, and of your harrying of us I became aware in my perambulator; for over against my house is Castle Island, a fortress built by William Barrett himself, William Fion—*i.e.*, the Fair—who probably landed somewhere on the west coast and came up between the great gaps between Slieve Cairn and Slieve Louan. William's party of Welshmen were followed by other Welshmen—the Cusacks, the Petits, and the Brownes; and these in time fell out with the Barretts and a great battle was fought, the battle of Moyne, in 1281, in which William Barrett was killed. But, notwithstanding their defeat, the Barretts held the upper hand in the district of Tyrawley for many a year; and the story is still current in Mayo that to avenge the death of their steward, who had been killed while collecting rents from the Lynotts, the Barretts assembled an armed force, and, after having defeated the Lynotts and capturing many of them, they offered the prisoners two forms of mutilation—to be blinded or castrated. The Lynotts, after taking counsel with their wise men, chose blindness; for blind men could have sons, and these would doubtless one day revenge the humiliation that was being passed upon them. A horrible story it is, for when their eyes had been thrust out with needles the Lynotts were led to a causeway, and those who crossed the stepping-stones without stumbling were taken back to have the needles thrust into their eyes again.

The story rambles on, the Lynotts plotting how they can

be revenged on the Barretts ; but it is unnecessary to pursue it further ; enough of it has been told to show that our histories have been intermingled from the earliest times. But let it be said, and at once, that it is not interest in our ancestry and wars that has inspired this epistle. I am interested in you because you have a language and a literature. I am interested in the Welsh language as a musician is in a musical instrument, and when my old friend Edward Martyn told me the Irish language was going to be revived, I was moved then as now to indite an epistle and to go over to Dublin to see Irish plays performed. My travelling companions to Dublin were Lady Gregory and Yeats, and in the pauses of the conversation I added sentence after sentence to my epistle : "A language that has not been much written is a new language—not the poet's, but the journalist's. . . . The Latin language produced a literature and died in the fifth century, and became a medium for theology rather than poetry ; but in the thirteenth century Italy changed her language ; the new language produced a new literature ; but Greece did not change her language, and no new literature sprang up in Greece." I cried out to Yeats, I could not do else, so impressed was I by the idea that had broken suddenly in the back of my mind, and I began to ask myself if the English language were not going the way of the Latin language, referring my thoughts to Lady Gregory as they came to me, and appealing to Yeats for words. But we arrived too late in Dublin ! Ireland had lost her language a hundred years before, and one of the speakers said, at the luncheon given to us by the Irish Literary Society : "If O'Connell had held up his hand and said, 'Let us speak Irish,' the Irish language would have been saved." The speaker spoke truly, but apparently his thought stopped there. He omitted to say that O'Connell was a Catholic, and probably forgot that the bias of the good Catholic is for Latin, which is only natural, since transubstantiation is impossible, or very nearly, in any language but Latin ; perhaps I should include

Greek! "So why should we bother about the Irish language?" has always been the feeling of Roman priests, latent or expressed, and rank hostility to the Irish Bible, which reminds them of the Reformation, and their shame, for the Irish Bible was written by a Protestant. Dear cousins, all our misfortunes go back to the Reformation, which Ireland refused to accept, thereby losing her chance of obtaining a national religion. She need not have accepted English Protestantism, it was open to her to invent a Protestantism of her own; variety is the genius of Protestantism, and Protestantism says: "Read the Bible, and enough for your need will be revealed to you." So every Protestant invents a religion out of the Bible for himself, and that is one of the reasons why Protestants are more literary than Catholics; each man is sufficient unto himself. Protestantism is in all languages; Romanism in a language that was worn out in the fifth century. Everything wears out; an old piano tinkles, the horn becomes hoarse, and despite care and varnish the wood of the violin yields at last. Everything is climatic; Buddhism thrives in the East, Mohammedanism in the South-East, Christianity in the West; language, too, is climatic: a language is expressive and beautiful in the country that produced it. As soon as a language passes beyond its natural frontier it weakens, disintegrates, decays; Asiatics cannot express themselves in English, and what we say in French is not worth saying. The thought that sustains a book is but a small part of the book; a thought is common property, but the words belong to the writer, and he cannot be dispossessed of his verbal beauty any more than a sculptor and painter can be robbed of their surfaces. I will dare to guess that you have heard somebody saying, and with much pomp, that if Wales has a message to deliver to England it will be in English, and not in Welsh; but is not everybody's message to himself rather than to his cousin? Is it not rather our business to escape from influence than to court influence, and now more than ever since railway trains and steamboats have brought all nations

together, making the world alike?

Not to be like others, to have no fellows beyond your frontiers, should henceforth be your aim. But we can escape from fellows only by conquering our lust for knowledge, by refusing to be educated and deliberately cultivating ignorance. It is only by remaining ignorant of much that we can retain ourselves. Ah! yes, educate yourselves, but be not educated. Believe that the kingdom is within you and not within your frontiers. To have a frontier you must have a language. Believe that; take it from me, my one and only certitude, in a word, of change. But we only change our superficial selves, our mental skins; I am what I was twelve years ago, and have come to Cardiff on the same errand as I went to Dublin. Cardiff, it appears, is yielding to English influence; Welsh is retiring before the language that will soon be the business language of the world. Loss of a language afflicts me as a heresy afflicted the saints. In Cardiff Welsh is understood, but not spoken, especially in society. The language is not dead, but dying, in Cardiff, so I am told, and have come to tell you that once a language is dead it is vain to indulge in the hope of a resurrection. It was a pathetic sight in Dublin in 1900 to see the people trying to learn their language in school, out of books, grammars, and dictionaries, and it was pathetic to hear them say: "We have learned to read Irish, but there is nothing for us to read in Irish!" In examination I found that they were quite ignorant of the Bible—of the Old and New Testaments; and hearing that the Irish Bible is a beautiful book, comparing very favourably with the English and Welsh translations, I advocated a general distribution of Bibles. But I was soon reminded that the Irish Bible was the work of Protestant hands and therefore could not be read by Catholics; and I bethought myself of a translation of some great classic masterpiece, and offered to share expenses with Edward Martyn for a translation of the "Arabian Nights" into Irish. But no sooner was the announcement made than an outcry was raised that the text

to be used was Burton's. But if the Gaelic movement was to continue, the people must have something to read, and I wrote a volume of short stories, and these were translated into Irish; but fault was found with these stories by the Catholic newspapers, and a priest told me that the Irish people found interest only in stories about miracles.

It seems to me that he is right, and, like many another Irishman before me, I asked myself if the Irish were irreparably Catholic, inferior, subaltern, second-class, or if the advent of another St. Paul would redeem the Irish race; a problem that may be debated for a long time without a clear conclusion being arrived at; suffice it to say that there was no Paul in Ireland in 1900; a Peter was the best we could do in 1900 in the way of Apostles. Dr. Hyde was then, and doubtless still is, the spit of that timid fellow who would never take sides, who was always for being in agreement with both sides, however different their views were—a policy which generally ends in pleasing nobody. Here ends my account of our attempt to revive the Irish language; and it has been set down here for your guidance, my dear cousins. You have your language to-day, but to-morrow it may have passed out from the towns to the villages, as Irish did. As soon as that happens revivalists will start up and beseech you not to allow the language to perish, but they will not be able to get it out of the villages back to the towns; it will fade and disappear like a cloud. You have your language; you all speak and write Welsh, and Welsh, unlike Irish, has given birth to a modern literature; as late as the eighteenth century a poet was writing poems in Welsh as beautiful as—I asked Kuno Meyer to name an English poet, and he mentioned one of our great poets—Coleridge. But I have been told that Welsh is not written and spoken as generally to-day as it was in the eighteenth century; you have no great poet. That you will say is not your fault; however great our necessity, a great poet will not arise at our bidding. True enough, but you can never have a great poet again in Wales if you do not keep

the language alive for him. It is said that you will soon have a Parliament ; if the first Act passed by your Parliament be that all debates shall be conducted in Welsh, my opinion of the value of Parliaments will need to be reconsidered. It is not unlikely that you would like to have it in Cardiff rather than in Carnarvon. If that be so, begin to prepare your Welsh at once, and one of the best ways of studying Welsh will be to turn to the old literature and to attend the Welsh theatre that is being offered to you now by Lord Howard de Walden, a Welshman, or of Welsh ancestry, as his name Ellis affirms, of innate Welsh sympathies born and bred in the bone, as myself can testify, for when we met twelve years ago he was a very young man—not more than three-and-twenty—writing plays and poems on Welsh subjects. Since those early days his interest in Wales and the Welsh people has increased. He can speak Welsh a little ; he can write it, and in a few years he will know it as many among us know French and German ; Welsh will become to him a sort of step-language. He may write a play in Welsh. Be that as it may, the theatre that he offers you comes out of his heart ; it is the fruit of all his sympathies ; and it is for you to take it and make a success of it. As he has said to you, there is one thing that a theatre cannot do without—an audience. Be his audience, and make him proud of you and of the original step he has taken, and it is of a certainty an original step to endow a theatre. Men will give money to everything but a theatre, which seems odd, for man can get better value for his money from a theatre than from a picture gallery. But for some hidden reason forty thousand pounds are instantly forthcoming for bad pictures, and Sir Thomas Lipton must have spent half a million of money upon empty hulls only, neither beautiful nor useful, and whose lives are the briefest ; yet he continues to pour out money trying to win an ugly cup. If half the money he has spent on yachts had been spent on a national theatre, he would be remembered, and I suppose, like another, he would like to be remembered for a

few years after his death. But he likes yacht racing; it amuses him, and I suppose that is why he spends money upon it, for we all do what amuses us. Art only amuses the artist, and that is why artists help artists. It was Liszt who recognized Wagner's genius soon after he wrote *Tannhäuser*, and gave him money and pianos till he met the King of Bavaria; and long after Liszt helped him not only with money, but with *motifs*. It is never the philistine that helps art, but the artist; and Lord Howard de Walden is willing to give a theatre to Wales because himself is a writer, and no mean one, as yourselves know. You have seen one of his plays—*The Death of Llewellyn*—you act it in English, you act it in Welsh. And he has written a trilogy—three Welsh operas dealing with your national legends; the first of these was produced last year, and the second will be produced in a few days in Drury Lane. He has also written a play entitled *Lanval*, which was acted some years ago, and was approved by criticism generally, and accepted as a very reasonable play in blank verse. His play *Heraclius* will be given one of these days, and it is because he has written these plays that he was inspired to help other men to write plays. It is always the artist that helps art.

The idea of this theatre that has come to you is familiar to me, for in the days when I used to come over from Ireland and stay at Seaford House I used to confide to Lord Howard all my plans for the revival of the Irish language, and one of my plans was a travelling theatre; my plan had come down to me from Goethe, who, when he was consulted as to the best means whereby the German language might be established in Poland, answered: "The best way to interest a people in a language is through the theatre. Everybody," he said, "is interested in the theatre. And it is not necessary," he added, "that the plays should be very literary—small homely plays will do better." Whether Goethe's plan for popularizing the German language in Poland was adopted I don't know, but it was not adopted in Ireland, and for the

nine hundred and ninety and nine foolish reasons that prevail in Peterish countries. The Gaelic League proved as stubborn as the Jews of Jerusalem, and after a great meeting the scribes protested that they could no longer stay in the League unless adequate chaperons were provided for the ladies taking part in these entertainments. But an idea never dies; it is crushed in one place to break out in another, and Goethe's idea has come to birth in Wales, and with your appreciation and support and goodwill it will be developed on the lines indicated by Goethe—a little company of strolling players acting small and unpretentious plays. The first tour has been arranged for a short period, and I think Lord Howard has been well advised to set a time limit on the first tour, for during the interval between the first and second tour you will consider his propaganda and decide whether you will give it your support. Once again I will quote him: "One thing a theatre cannot do without is an audience." Give him audiences and his company will stimulate interest in the Welsh race and the Welsh language and the Welsh genius. Lord Howard's theatre will give everybody who has written a play an opportunity of seeing his play acted; a French proverb runs: *C'est l'occasion qui fait le rang;* we may adapt it to our circumstances, and say it is opportunity that makes the play. It is impossible to act all plays that are written; but I think that Lord Howard's company of players practically guarantee that anyone who writes a meritorious play will have the pleasure of seeing it acted. If his strolling players should prove a success, Lord Howard may be tempted to do something on a larger scale; but there is no need that he should. A small travelling theatre will awaken interest in the Welsh language and will tempt people to speak, to read, and to write Welsh. To write well is the main point; and the best way to learn to write well is to translate, for translation, though you may not think it, is a more difficult art than original writing; we learn to use a language better by writing out another man's thoughts than our own; if we write out

our own thoughts we select thoughts for transcription that we can express easily. Do not believe that translation dies and original writing lives; the Bible and the German translation of Shakespeare disprove that. Another advantage of translation, of prose translation, is the amusement the translator gets out of his work; he is always at it, maybe while driving the cattle home from the fields, while fishing in the bay, freed from the misery of composition; writing for him is an unmixed blessing. Wherefore a translation should exceed the original for verbal beauty, as it does very often. Our Tudor translations often exceed in beauty the originals that inspired them; and good translations are necessary, for however well we know a foreign language we never understand it, not even our own writings in it. Some friends of mine began to read Rousseau's "Confessions" through thick clouds of very mercenary English that let through none of Rousseau's genius. "Translate a few pages and we shall understand better," my friends said to me, and I consented, little thinking that these pages would mean a week's labour. The first sentence was difficult, but it seemed impossible to turn the second into English: *Je sens mon cœur et je connais les hommes.* One of the translators rendered this sentence: "I know men and have studied mankind." Another translator rendered it: "I feel my heart and know mankind." A third translator had it: "I know my heart and I know men." It is obvious to everybody that all these renderings are inferior to the original, but it is not easy to put English words on *Je sens mon cœur et je connais les hommes.* A sentence as simple, as intense and curt as Rousseau's was sought in vain; in my walks, in tramcars, when I sat with my friends in the evening, I was translating. But it was not till the end of the week that I sprang out of bed crying: "I have a heart and know men!" My translation is not as good as the original, but it is as good as anything the English language can give. Another phrase difficult to translate is the celebrated phrase which many believe to be in the Bible, but

which is part of Sterne's "Sentimental Journey": "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." Sterne does not give this phrase as his own; he puts it into the mouth of a half-witted girl whom he met on the roadside in France. The original phrase was therefore in French, but it is as difficult to find anything as good in French as Sterne's English. *Dieu adoucie le vent en faveur de l'agneau tondu* is correct, but dreadfully commonplace; so commonplace that even the most mercenary translator would hesitate before committing it to paper. He would pause for a moment to consider a more literal rendering, and I can imagine him saying to himself: "*Tempère le vent* is neater, but is it correct French?" If he had time to look in the dictionary he would find that *Dieu tempère le vent* is possible French—difficult, erudite, far-fetched, but still possible. His difficulties would not end here. What preposition should follow *tempère? Dieu tempère le vent à l'agneau tondu* is a pretty phrase, but the French is doubtful; and we cannot help wondering how the French girl expressed a thought that has become part of our language. As likely as not in the phrase that I suggested first, that commonplace French, *Dieu adoucie le vent en faveur de l'agneau tondu.* If it were, then, and it couldn't have been else, Sterne, the translator, becomes the original writer, for it was he who created the beauty, and the poor original writer who suggested the idea remains unknown.*

* As I said these words a man sitting in the front row of the stalls cried, "*Très bien, très bien!*" And the accent with which he said the words told unmistakably that he was a Frenchman. "He will speak to me," I said, "on the subject of the lost French proverb." And, sure enough, as soon as my lecture was finished, he rose from his chair and advanced to meet me. The moment was not very favourable, for the search for a better phrase than "*adoucie le vent,*" but he confessed, as the crowd surged round us, that for the moment he could not think of any other—"*Calme le vent, peut-être?*" The proverb in question he had never heard, yet he had lived a great deal in the country in France.

"Lost, no doubt, irreparably," I said, "for I have sought it everywhere."

"I have got it! I have got it!" a voice cried, and a florid-faced Scotchman in grey clothes, whirling a paper, elbowed his way to us.

An idea is mine to-day, it is yours to-morrow, the day after to-morrow it belongs to the whole world; but a beautiful sentence is always the property of him who made it. I would have young Welshmen imitate Sterne, who took a forgotten French proverb and made it immortal. I said just now that the German who translated Shakespeare will be remembered when the German of original writers in German is forgotten. Andrew Lang is another such immortal; all his original writing will perish—has perished already—but he will be remembered, for he translated "Theocritus." Now, why shouldn't some Welsh writers commit themselves to memory through translation, and thereby acquire an extraordinary knowledge of their own language, and furnish their country-men with examples of beautiful Welsh. Beautiful Welsh is the need of to-day, and it will be the need of to-morrow; if the language is to be preserved somebody must write in it beautifully. Only the languages that have been written in beautifully remain; the spoken language passes away like the dust on the road, and Welshmen have to-day an opportunity of writing beautifully, for Welsh has not been corrupted by journalists. The Welsh language is at once an old and a new language, and if I may end where I began I would compare the English language to a coat that has been worn by so many people and in so many different weathers, clement

---

"I have got it! I have got it! The proverb!" he cried.

"But are you French?" I said.

"No, I am Scotch; but I am interested in languages." And he handed us a paper, and we read: "*Dieu mesure le vent à brebis tondue.*" The moment the words were said and seen there could be no doubt that that was the proverb, and, despite the crowd, we discussed Sterne's translation. "God tempers the wind" is certainly better than "*Dieu medure le vent,*" for the word "tempers" brings into the phrase an idea of weather and climate. But Sterne falls short of the original in the second part of the sentence. He could not write, "God tempers the wind to the shorn sheep," so he wrote, "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," and it is not unlikely that the phrase owes its celebrity to the substitution of the word "lamb" for "sheep." We do not shear lambs, it is true, and Sterne might have said "ewe," but he felt, perhaps, that a little false sentiment would popularize his translation. If he did, he was very subtle; but whether he did or not, it is quite certain that it was the shivering lamb that made the phrase memorable.

and inclement, that it is green with age and threadbare at the seams. Pater said that one must write in English as if it were a dead language; and Stevenson picked his way, avoiding stereotyped phrases with great ingenuity, but he did not write like the elder writers, spontaneously, easily, carelessly. When we write in English we think in one language—the language of the street—and translate into another language. "Oh, ye foolish Cymry! Who hath bewitched you, that you should seek to put off a new coat to put on an old one?" If the English language were as easily written to-day as it was in the time of Elizabeth, it would still be better for Welshmen to write in their own language, and for a very sufficient reason—the volume of English literature is so great that it is presumptuous folly for anyone to think that he can add to it. The Irish language is dead; the Welsh language is still alive, and it is the duty of everyone here present—except myself—to try to keep it alive.